Trees, Kings, and Politics: Studies in Assyrian Iconography

Porter, Barbara Nevling

Abstract: The essays collected in this volume (two previously unpublished) examine ways in which the kings of ancient Assyria used visual images to shape political attitudes and behavior at the royal court, in the Assyrian homeland, and in Assyria's vast and culturally diverse empire. The essays discuss visual images commissioned by Assyrian kings between the ninth and seventh century B.C., all carved in stone and publicly displayed - some on steles erected in provincial cities or in temples, some on the massive stone slabs lining the walls of Assyrian palaces and temples, and one on top of a stone bearing an inscription granting privileges to a recently conquered state. Although the essays examine a wide assortment of images, they develop a single hypothesis: that Neo-Assyrian kings saw visual images as powerful and effective tools of public persuasion, and that Assyrian carvings were often commissioned for much the same reason that modern politicians arrange "photo opportunities" - to shape political opinion and behavior in diverse and not always cooperative populations by means of publicly displayed, politically charged visual images. Although there is increasing agreement among Assyriologists and art historians that Assyrian royal stone carvings were created and displayed at least in part for their political impact on contemporaries, there is still considerable debate about the effectiveness of visual imagery as a political tool, about the message each particular image was designed to convey, and about the audiences these images were meant to influence. These are the problems the essays collected here confront. Four of the essays focus on a group of enigmatic, widely varied images often lumped under the misleading rubric, "the Assyrian sacred tree." The essays collected here consider the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II as the setting for one important group of these images; the implications of the scene in which winged figures flank the "tree" image and touch it with bumpy oval objects; the proposal advanced by Simo Parpola that some Assyrians understood the image to represent the Assyrian king as "perfect man"; and the function of the scene showing the "tree" with winged figures as an Assyrian response to a haunting sense of time as destroyer. Other essays in the volume explore the political implications of the images carved on the object known as "The Black Stone of Esarhaddon"; the potential for visual images to undermine the political agenda they were intended to support; the adaptation of similar images to carry different political messages; and the role of visual imagery in an Assyrian propaganda that presented messages of both intimidation and friendly persuasion.

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Abbreviations

AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AHw.	W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965-81)
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
Borger, *IAK*	Riekele Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (Graz: self-publication by the editor, 1956)
BiOr	*Bibliotheca Orientalis*
CAD	A. Leo Oppenheim, et al., ed., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago and Glückstadt: The Oriental Insitute and J.J. Augustin, 1956-)
CT 44	Th. Pinches, ed., *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part 44: Miscellaneous Texts* (London: British Museum, 1963)
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
KAR	*Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 28 and 34 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1919 and 1923)
l., ll.	line, lines
Lie, *Sargon*	A. G. Lie, *The Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria, Part I: The Annals* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929)
Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I	Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und Ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd)*, Baghdader Forschungen 2 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981)
n.	note
n. s.	new series

OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II	Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Sobolewski, *The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) II*, Baghdader Forschungen 10 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1987)
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pl., pls.	plate, plates
IR	Henry C. Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia, Vol. I: A Selection from the Historical Inscriptions of Chaldea, Assyria, and Babylonia* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1861)
RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods (A. Kirk Grayson, ed.; University of Toronto Press, 1987 ff.)
RIA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1928-)
SAA	State Archives of Assyria (Helsinki University Press, 1987-)
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies (The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, University of Helsinki, 1992-)
Tf.	Tafel, Tafeln

Introduction

> I, [King Esarhaddon], caused a stele (*narû*) to be made, and on it I had inscribed the praise of the valor of Assur, my lord, the power of my deeds as I roamed about with the aid of Assur, my lord, and the triumphant conquest by my (own) hands; I caused it to be erected for the awed gaze (*tabrītu*) of all enemies into the distant future. (Borger, *IAK*, pp. 99-100, Mnm. A, rev., ll. 50b-57)

The eight essays collected here explore the use of visual imagery by the kings of ancient Assyria as a tool for shaping political attitudes and behavior at the royal court, in the Assyrian homeland, and in Assyria's vast and culturally diverse empire. The essays consider a wide variety of visual images commissioned by Assyrian rulers between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C., each carved in stone and publicly displayed, whether on steles that were erected in provincial cities or in temples, on massive stone slabs that lined the walls of Assyrian palaces and temples, or, as in one unusual case, on the top of a stone that carried an inscribed royal text bestowing privileges on a recently conquered state. Although they focus on a wide variety of visual images, the essays are linked by a common hypothesis: that the rulers of the Neo-Assyrian empire understood visual images to be powerful and effective tools of public persuasion, and that they commissioned many of their carvings for much the same reason that modern politicians create "photo opportunities" – to shape political opinion and behavior in diverse and not always cooperative populations by means of publicly displayed, politically charged visual images.

Assyrian texts are largely silent about the purpose of these carvings. The passage quoted above is a rare exception, perhaps the only case in which an Assyrian king appears to comment explicitly on the intended effect of visual images he has just commissioned for public display. The stele Esarhaddon referred to was a massive stone monument he had erected in the citadel gate of Sam'al, a provincial city of somewhat uncertain loyalty.[1] Prominently displayed, the stele carried an inscribed text describing Esarhaddon's recent triumphant campaign against Egypt, as well as large carvings in bas-relief that depicted Esarhaddon, two of his sons, and a pair of recently defeated enemies held on leashes and standing abjectly at the king's feet.

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[1] The stele is discussed in more detail below in the essay, "Assyrian Propaganda for the West."

Esarhaddon's statement in the text, explaining that he had erected the stele "for the awed gaze (*tabrītu*) of all enemies into the distant future," is an explicit declaration that the stele's primary intended audience was enemies of Assyria, present and future, and that its purpose was to inspire awe in them. The stele's verbal account, which describes Esarhaddon's military success in considerable detail, and its carved images, which show him looming imperiously over his defeated enemies, together suggest that the point of the stele was not only to awe, but to intimidate. The use of the noun *tabrītu*, derived from the verb *barû* 'to see, behold, gaze upon, observe,' focuses attention on the stele's visual aspects and implies that it was not so much the text that Esarhaddon had in mind, as the impact of the stele's striking visual image.[2]

Esarhaddon's comment implies that the Sam'al stele's visual images were intended to act as a deterrent, a reminder to contemporary and future enemies that opposition to Assyria would prove costly. His comment shows that shaping contemporary political behavior was indeed one motive for the commissioning and public display of visual images by Assyrian kings. This conclusion is further supported by the often prominent public settings in which Assyrian royal carvings were displayed, by the obvious political significance of many of the individuals and groups to whom particular sets of carvings were displayed, and, above all, by the political significance of the messages particular carvings appear to have conveyed to their contemporary audiences. Such considerations have produced a growing consensus among Assyriologists and art historians that such Assyrian carvings were designed and displayed at least in part for their political impact on contemporaries.[3]

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[2] See *CAD* s. v. *barû* A (especially under section 5, the causative, for citations referring to visually intimidating sights, such as the carnage of a particularly bloody battle, or the public flaying of rebel leaders) and *AHw* s. vv. *barû(m)* and *tabrītu(m)*. For further discussion, see Barbara N. Porter, "'For the Astonishment of All Enemies': Assyrian Propaganda and Its Audience in the Reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 35 (2000), pp. 7-18, especially note 23. Irene J. Winter has recently discussed the noun *tabrītu* and its overtones of repeated or continuous looking, with a resulting effect of admiration and awe, in her article, "The Eyes Have It: Votive Statuary, Gilgamesh's Axe, and Cathected Viewing in the Ancient Near East," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, Robert S. Nelson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 22-44.

[3] For recent discussion of the political functions of Assyrian visual images, see, for example, Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), pp. 2-38; John M. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Julian E. Reade, who argues that the Assyrian palace "was a massive corpus of personal propaganda" for the king who was its owner and that royal steles were "the Assyrian equivalent of a political poster", "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires,* Mogens

Despite this growing consensus, however, there is still much debate about the message particular sets of public visual images were designed to convey, about the audience or audiences that were the intended target of those messages, and about the effectiveness of such visual images in shaping political behavior. It is these problems that the eight essays collected here grapple with.

The essays with which the book opens focus on one of the most intensely debated topics in Assyrian studies in the past decade: the meaning of a set of complex, enigmatic images that were a persistent and important element in Assyrian visual imagery. This set of images has come to be referred to, somewhat misleadingly, as "the Assyrian sacred tree" – a term applied not to a single image of consistent appearance but to a wide variety of not necessarily related tree- and bush-like images, a term applied to images whose sacred significance is debated, and a term applied to images in many cases so elaborate that they clearly represent something more complex than a tree, although a stylized palm tree is often represented at their center. One version of this "tree" image was the dominant image in the decorative program of the impressive and innovative Northwest Palace of King Assurnasirpal II; for several generations thereafter, stylized "tree" images continued to be an element in the visual program of Assyrian palaces, and they long remained an important image in seals, clothing decoration, and other media. The first four essays presented here represent a series of efforts to understand the significance of these important images, to account for their eventual near-disappearance from Assyrian palaces, and to analyze their role in shaping attitudes toward the Assyrian king and the state he ruled.

The first of the essays dealing with these "tree" images was written in 1989 as a brochure describing the remarkable collection of carvings from the Northwest Palace that are part of the collections of the Bowdoin Col-

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T. Larsen, ed. (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), pp. 331 and 340; and Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," ibid. pp. 297-317, especially p. 302. For a summary of recent discussion of Assyrian visual imagery and its political significance, see Irene J. Winter, "Art *in* Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimension of Assyrian Ideology," in *Assyria 1995* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 359-81, especially p. 377. On the political functions of earlier Mesopotamian visual imagery, see e.g., Claudia E. Suter, *Gudea's Temple Building: The Representation of an Early Mesopotamian Ruler in Text and Image* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), Irene J. Winter, "After the Battle is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East," in H. L. Kessler and M. S. Simpson, ed., *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1985), pp. 11-32, and idem, " Sex, Rhetoric and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body of Naram-Sîn of Agade," in Natalie Kampen, ed., *Sexuality in Ancient Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11-26.

lege Museum of Art in Brunswick, Maine.[4] The essay is intended to serve here as an introduction to the palace, which functioned as a new seat of government for the rapidly expanding Assyrian empire and also as a visual backdrop for the king's public appearances and private life.

The second essay, published in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* in 1993, explores the meaning of the scene in which the "tree" images of Assurnasirpal's palace often appeared and its implications for the meaning of the image itself.[5]

The third essay was originally presented during a panel discussion held in 1996 at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society. Late in 1993, Simo Parpola had also published an article in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* presenting a markedly different interpretation of the "tree" image. Parpola argued that the "tree" was a secret and esoteric diagram representing the Assyrians' chief patron god Assur as including all gods within himself, an image of what Parpola argued to be an essentially monotheistic concept that had predated the Israelite development of monotheism by several centuries. Parpola's complex and highly original interpretation elicited great controversy, and the panel, organized by Jack M. Sasson, was designed to offer responses and evaluations of Parpola's theory from the points of view of specialists in different fields, ranging from medieval Jewish kabbala, which had played an influential role in Parpola's reasoning, to esoteric number theory and its role in Assyrian theology.

I was invited to respond to the iconographic aspects of Parpola's argument. The proposed publication of the panel's discussions and Parpola's responses to them proved in time impossible, so that my essay appears here in print for the first time. It engages only one aspect of Parpola's argument, his theory that the "tree" image as a whole was considered to represent not only the gods, but also the Assyrian king. In considering the iconographic aspects of Parpola's theories about the meaning of the "tree" image, I gradually became convinced that it was not possible on the basis of iconographic evidence alone either to prove the correctness of Parpola's theory that the image was a visual representation of the concept that all gods are one, nor to disprove it, since any identification of elements of the "tree" with particular Assyrian gods remains, in my view, hypothetical, but not impossible. The idea that the "tree" was also understood to be an image of the king as "the perfect man," however, seems to me unlikely in the light of the iconographic evidence, and it is this problem that my essay addresses.

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[4] *Assyrian Bas-reliefs at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art* (Bowdoin College Museum of Art: Brunswick, Maine, 1989).

[5] "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52 no. 2 (1993), pp. 129-39,

The fourth essay in the volume considers the "tree" image of Assurnasirpal's palace from a rather different angle. As part of the celebrations marking the beginning of a new millennium, Jan Schall, associate curator of modern and contemporary art at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, organized an exhibition entitled "Tempus Fugit: Time Flies" to explore different ideas about time and the passing of time as reflected in works of art. The essay published here was part of the catalog of that exhibition, commenting on the Assyrian "tree" image, with its accompanying guardian deities, as a reflection of the Assyrians' pervasive sense of time as destroyer.[6]

The fifth essay in the collection examines politically charged imagery of a quite different kind, a set of strange images carved into the top of a stone on whose sides were inscribed the text of a royal inscription of King Esarhaddon. It has long been argued that these enigmatic carvings represent in some fashion a writing of Esarhaddon's name and perhaps also of his titles or epithets.[7] The essay that appears here, first published in a *Festschrift* honoring William W. Hallo, considers the intended impact of these signs on the Babylonian audience for whom they appear to have been intended.[8]

The sixth essay further develops a hypothesis I first proposed in an essay written in 1998 in honor of the classical art historian Sara A. Immerwahr.[9] It weighs the likely political effect of a set of unusual royal images representing the Assyrian king Assurbanipal and his brother Shamash-shumukin that were carved on the face of steles erected in the cities of Babylon and Borsippa.

The seventh essay examines the case of three massive steles erected by King Esarhaddon in the final days of his reign (one of which, incidentally,

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[6] "*Winged Genie Fertilizing a Date Tree*: Seasonal Time and Eternity in Ancient Assyria," was originally published in *Tempus Fugit: Time Flies*, Jan Schall, ed. (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Kansas City, Missouri, 2000), pp. 213-18.

[7] Since this essay first appeared, scholars have proposed a variety of ways to read the enigmatic signs as representations of the king's name and titles: Irving L. Finkel and Julian E. Reade, "Assyrian Hieroglyphs," *ZA* 86 (1996), pp. 244-68; JoAnn Scurlock, "Assyrian Hieroglyphs Enhanced," *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* (1997, fasicle 2), pp. 85-86; and Michael Roaf and Annette Zgoll, "Assyrian Astroglyphs: Lord Aberdeen's Black Stone and the Prisms of Esarhaddon," *ZA* 91(2001) and 92 (2002), forthcoming.

[8] "Conquest or *Kudurru*'s? A Note on Peaceful Strategies of Assyrian Government," in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg, ed. (CDL Press: Bethesda, Maryland, 1993), pp. 194-97.

[9] "Ritual and Politics in Assyria: Neo-Assyrian Kanephoric Stelai for Babylonia" in Charis: *Essays in Honor of Sara A. Immerwahr*, Anne Chapin, ed. (special volume of *Hesperia*), forthcoming.

carries the text with which this essay began). The steles, two of which are inscribed with texts, carry nearly identical carvings depicting Esarhaddon, two Assyrian princes, and a pair of recently defeated enemies, standing submissively before the king. The essay examines the probable effect of the images and their accompanying texts on the two rather different cities in which the steles were erected.[10]

The final essay in the volume has recently appeared in a *Festschrift* honoring Hayim and Miriam Tadmor. It returns to the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II to reexamine the nature of Assyrian propaganda and the complex and carefully varied message it presented to its chosen audiences.[11]

The eight essays gathered here were written over a period of thirteen years as contributions to debates that were then in full swing (and that are in many cases still underway). Believing that the essays make most sense in the context in which they were originally composed, I have left them unchanged, resisting the temptation to add references to studies not yet written when the essays first appeared, or to revise my argument to reflect what I have since learned from colleague's astute responses or from further reflection. Similarly, the presence or absence of diacritical marks on Akkadian words and names in each essay conforms to the style of the volume in which the essay first appeared. Inevitably, I no longer agree completely with what is argued here (it is the sorry fate of scholars to change their minds or learn something new just after their articles appear in print); nevertheless, it seems to me that these essays still have a useful contribution to make and should be left as they are, warts and all, voices from the recent past speaking urgently to the present from a context that has already begun to change.

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[10] The essay was published as "Assyrian Propaganda for the West: Esarhaddon's Stelae for Til Barsip and Sam'al" in *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age*, Guy Bunnens, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Supplement 7 (Louvain/Paris/Sterling, Virginia: Peeters Press, 2000), pp. 143-76.

[11] *Eretz Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* (Tadmor Volume, no. 27), Israel Eph'al, Amnon Ben-Tor, Peter Machinist, ed. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2003), pp. 180-91.

Assyrian Bas-reliefs at Bowdoin College

The great stone figures that today line the rotunda of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art were carved more than 2,500 years ago for the palaces and temples of Assurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.), ruler of the empire of Assyria, centered in what is now northern Iraq. An energetic soldier, Assurnasirpal II conducted campaigns against the rich cities of North Syria, gaining control of trade to and from the Mediterranean.

Rich in booty, slaves, and exotic raw materials from his conquests, Assurnasirpal began construction of a new capital, to be known as Kalḫu (biblical Calah, modern Nimrūd). Construction began as early as 879 B.C., the fifth year of Assurnasirpal's reign, and was to continue almost until his death twenty years later. The city, a symbol of Assyria's growing power as well as a center of government, was built on a massive scale. Its encircling walls, crowned with more than a hundred towers, were thirty-nine feet thick and five miles long. Massive gateways led into a center inhabited by some 16,000 people, most of them deportees brought from lands Assurnasirpal had conquered.

Within the walls, in the southwest corner of the city, workmen raised a high mound of some sixty acres, towering over the lower city. On this heavily fortified citadel Assurnasirpal built temples, public buildings, and a great palace to serve as his royal residence and as the administrative center of the empire.[12] It was to decorate the walls of this building, the Northwest Palace, that Assurnasirpal commissioned the carving of more than two hundred stone panels, including those now at Bowdoin.

Visitors entered the palace (Fig. 1) from the east, through a great outer courtyard lined with offices and storerooms, with the temple of the city's patron god Ninurta and its high ziggurat, or temple tower, looming beyond them. On the south side of this courtyard, in a long wall decorated with carved figures of foreigners bearing tribute to the king, were three massive doorways guarded by colossal statues of winged bulls with human heads; through these doorways lay the throne room itself, a narrow hall 125 feet long, decorated with carved panels showing the king, guardian deities, and scenes of the king's military victories.

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[12] Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Plan 1.

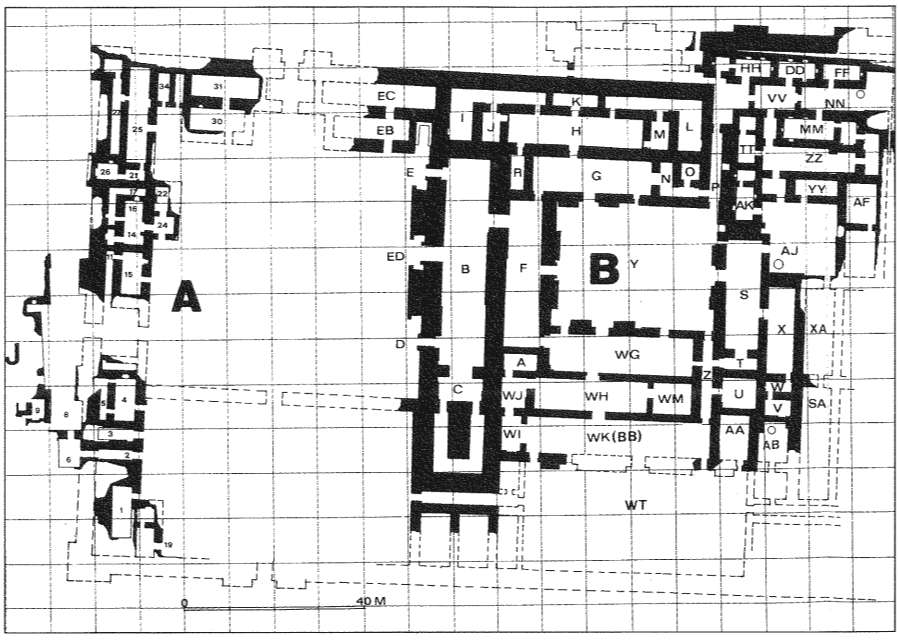

Figure 1 Plan of the Northwest Palace, Nimrūd

The ambassador or visiting dignitary who penetrated beyond this formal audience chamber would find himself in a huge inner courtyard, again lined with carvings; opening off each side were still more long, formal halls, suitable for religious ceremonies or for banquets of as many as one hundred people. These state apartments, Assurnasirpal's inscriptions tell us, were outfitted "in splendid fashion," with doors of cedar, cypress, and other exotic woods, thrones of ebony and boxwood, and dishes of ivory, silver, and gold. Archaeologists have uncovered hundreds of fragments of intricately carved ivory panels that once decorated the royal furniture, evidence of the great luxury of the palace in its heyday.

Late in the reign, when the palace was formally dedicated, Assurnasirpal gave a banquet that lasted for ten days, at which he entertained, he tells us, 69,574 guests, including Assyrian citizens and officials, foreign dignitaries, and the entire population of Kalḫu. The menu included, among other delicacies, 14,000 sheep, 1,000 spring lambs, 10,000 eggs, 10,000 wild pigeons, 10,000 jugs of beer, 10,000 skins of wine, 100 containers of honey, 100 containers of onions, and 10 homers of shelled pistachio nuts.

Despite its pomp and power, Kalḫu was destroyed by Assyria's enemies in 612 B.C. For centuries it lay in ruins. It was not until the middle of the nineteeenth century that Europeans became interested in the huge mounds of earth along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and began to excavate them, uncovering the ruins of the ancient cities of Assyria and

Babylonia. Kalḫu was one of the first to be rediscovered, in an excavation that captured the imagination of Europe and America.

The excavation was conducted by a twenty-eight-year-old English diplomat named Austen Henry Layard, who had become convinced that mounds near the village of Nimrūd might hold the remains of an important ancient city. Afraid that local Turkish officials would deny him permission to dig, Layard resorted to a ruse. He writes, "On the 8th of November, having secretly procured a few tools, and engaged a mason at the moment of my departure, and carrying with me a variety of guns, spears, and other formidable weapons, I declared that I was going to hunt wild boars in a neighboring village, and floated down the Tigris on a small raft constructed for my journey."[13] He arrived at the site by nightfall. The following morning, November 9, 1845, with the help of seven Arab tribesmen hired nearby, Layard began digging. By midday he had uncovered a chamber lined with tall stone panels inscribed with cuneiform writing: Layard had discovered the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal at Kalḫu.

In the following months Layard's energetic efforts uncovered a succession of murals, ivories, and wall carvings. "By the end of April," he reports a little more than a year later, "I had explored almost the whole building; and had opened twenty-eight chambers cased with alabaster slabs."[14] By the time he closed his excavations in 1851, he had discovered three more palaces, an arsenal, two temples, and the walls of both citadel and city.

Layard had sent many reliefs and other artifacts from his excavations back to Britain for safekeeping and display, but he remained concerned about the safety of the many pieces left on the site. A group of American missionaries working in the area approached him to ask if they might send reliefs to institutions in the United States. One of these missionaries was Dr. Henri Byron Haskell, an 1855 graduate of the Medical School of Maine at Bowdoin College. He wrote to the Trustees of the College asking if his *alma mater* would like to have some of the carvings. The Trustees agreed, and five panels were duly sent by raft down the Tigris to India and thence by ship to America.

They arrived at Bowdoin in 1860, at a cost to the College of $728.17 in freight charges, and are now the most valuable works of sculpture in the Bowdoin collections. In 1906 a sixth piece, the fragmentary head of Assurnasirpal II, was added to the collection as the gift of Edward Perry Warren, a Bowdoin alumnus and the principal donor of the ancient collection at the museum.

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13 Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* I (New York: Geo. Putnam, 1850), p. 41.

14 Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* II, p. 4.

At Nimrūd there was more to come. In 1945, one hundred years after Layard's excavation, a team of British archaeologists led by Sir Max Mallowan reopened the excavations. Their work, and that of later teams of Iraqi and Polish archaeologists, has given us a much clearer picture of what life was like in the ancient city. In the Northwest Palace, these excavations have provided clues to where the now scattered wall carvings were originally located and to how each carved panel functioned in the elaborate decorative program of the palace as a whole.

The excavations have established that the public rooms of the palace were lined with large stone panels carved with images of the king, of supernatural guardian figures, or of scenes involving a symbolic tree. The carvings in a few rooms also showed scenes of war or the royal hunt. In addition, each panel carried an inscription, today known as the Standard Inscription of Assurnasirpal, which was repeated throughout the palace on some 310 slabs. This text, carved in the wedge-shaped writing called cuneiform and written in the Akkadian language, gives us a glimpse of the power that the Assyrians wielded from their capital at Kalḫu, and the splendor of the great palace that Bowdoin's bas-reliefs once adorned. It reads, in part:

> The ancient city Kalḫu which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, a prince who preceded me, had built – that city had become dilapidated; it lay dormant. I rebuilt that city. I took people which I had conquered from the lands over which I had gained dominion, from the land Suhu, (from) the entire land of Laqu, (from) the city Sirqu which is at the crossing of the Euphrates, (from) the entire land of Zamua, from Bit-Adini and the land Hatti and from Lubarna, the Patinean. I settled (them) therein. I cleared away the old ruin hill (and) dug down to water level. I sank (the foundation pit) down to a depth of 120 layers of brick. I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, *daprānu*-juniper, box-wood, *meskannu*-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity. I made (replicas of) beasts of mountains and seas in white limestone and *parūtu*-alabaster (and) stationed (them) at its doors. I decorated it in a splendid fashion; I surrounded it with

> knobbed nails of bronze. I hung doors of cedar, cypress, *daprānu*-juniper, (and) *meskannu*-wood in its doorways. I took in great quantities and put therein silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron, booty from the lands over which I gained dominion.[15]

The inscription served as a sort of generic caption; it described the king's qualities and achievements, while each carving presented a part of that message pictorially – the king as warrior, the king as priest, the gods' protection of Assyria, and so on – for a society in which few people could read.

Although scholars can now decipher the written message, the carved scenes still make important contributions to our understanding of Assurnasirpal's world; they offer us glimpses of the people who moved through the palace and glimpses of the supernatural beings that they believed to be there with them. In addition, the scenes chosen for each room offer clues to that room's function.

The panel at Bowdoin showing bird-headed figures facing a stylized tree (Pl. 1), for example, has now been identified as one of a series of panels lining a large inner room of the Northwest Palace (Room H in Fig. 1).[16] These supernatural figures, joined in this room by images of the king, of other winged spirits, and of symbolic trees, suggest that Room H may have been used for some of the many religious ceremonies that the king performed. Although there is still debate about the identity of the bird-headed creatures, statues of similar figures have been discovered beneath the floors of Assyrian houses, and Assyrian texts advise the use of them to protect against evil spirits. Perhaps the bird-men carved on the walls of the palace were meant as supernatural guardians.

The bird-headed creatures flank a stylized date palm tree, important as a source of food in Mesopotamia. The creatures reach forward in a stiff and ceremonial gesture, holding out toward the tree an oval object whose shape resembles the flower cluster of the date palm. Since date palms must be cross-pollinated by hand to ensure a good crop, this scene may represent a symbolic cross-pollination of the tree by supernatural beings, and thus the gods' gift of abundance to mankind. The niche cut in the top of the panel let air and light into the room from a nearby courtyard or from openings in the roof and may also have served as a storage shelf.

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[15] The translation is that of Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, Part 2: From Tiglath-pileser to Ashur-nasir-apli II*, Records of the Ancient Near East II (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), text 13, pp. 166-67, section 653.

[16] Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, p. 60, H-30.

The small relief showing the king (identified by his tapering hat and streamers) with sword and bow, followed by attendants (Pl. 2), probably comes from a small inner chamber of the palace (Room WI in Fig. 1), a room decorated with scenes of royal activities – war and perhaps a lion hunt.[17] The fact that the room was equipped with a drain suggests that it may have been used for rituals of washing and purification. In the scene shown here, the king, faced by an attendant with fly whisk and towel and followed by an official in an ornate "reversed apron" and by an attendant holding a parasol, seems about to pour a libation from the drinking bowl in his right hand, perhaps as thanks for a successful hunt.

Two of the Bowdoin reliefs depict a single winged protective spirit wearing the horned cap that was a mark of divinity. Like the bird-men, both figures carry a small bucket in one hand and an oval object, probably representing a date palm flower cluster, in the other. One of the figures (from Room T, Fig. 1) is shown, like the bird-men, facing a stylized date palm tree (Pl. 3).[18] These common elements suggest that all of the winged figures represent benevolent spirits making a gesture meant to confer blessing and fertility. The winged figure that appears without a stylized tree (Pl. 4) faced a doorway in one of the great inner halls (Room S, Fig. 1), reaching out as if to bless people who passed through the doorway before him.[19] On the tunic and shawl of this figure, the artist has carved intricate patterns of embroidery or weaving, showing kneeling bulls, cedar trees, rosettes, palmettes, and pomegranate fruits. The heavy musculature of the legs is a convention of Assyrian carving throughout the Northwest Palace.

On another bas-relief at Bowdoin the king is again shown with sword and bow, attributes of his roles as warrior and hunter (Pl. 5). A winged protective spirit follows him, its hand extended toward him in a gesture of blessing. The carving has been disfigured by broad gashes across the faces and wrists of the two figures, perhaps done by enemy soldiers during the fall of the city in 612 B.C. The figure sketchily carved on the right, facing the king, is another unusual feature of the panel. It was not part of the

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17 Or perhaps from a nearby room in the West Wing of the palace: J. E. Reade, "Texts and Sculptures from the North-west Palace, Nimrud," *Iraq* 47 (1985), p. 210; John B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnaṣirpal II*, AfO Beiheft 15 (Graz: self-publication by the editor, 1961), pp. 48 and 53-54 and pl. 66; Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II, pp. 72 and 77, WFL-16.

18 Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II, pp. 51 and 53, T-6.

19 Ibid, p. 42, S-17.

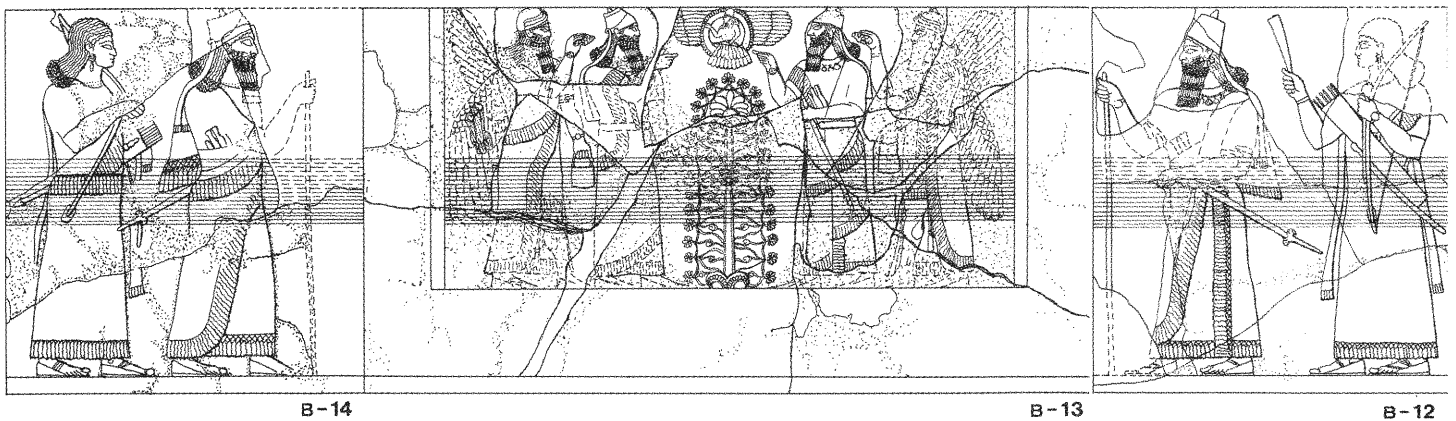

Figure 2 Tree Scene at the Center of the Northwest Palace Throne Room

original composition, since no raised stone was left for the carving of the lower body, but we have no evidence of the date, ancient or modern, when this figure was added to the panel. The cuneiform signs on this panel are unusually large, and the text varies somewhat from that used on the other Northwest Palace panels, indications that this relief may have come from a different building on the site.[20]

The fragmentary head of Assurnasirpal is a particularly important piece (Pl. 6), recently identified as the missing section of a three-paneled bas-relief facing the main public entrance to the palace throne room (on the inner wall of Room B facing Doorway ED, Fig. 1).[21] This relief confronted a visiting dignitary or official as he entered the throne room, just before he turned to face the enthroned king. The fragmentary head was part of the left-hand panel, which shows the king and his weapon bearer advancing toward a central panel (Fig. 2). In the central panel the king, followed by winged figures, raises his hand toward the symbolic tree over which hovers the figure of a god, probably Assur, chief god of Assyria.

An unusual feature of this fragment is the traces of black paint on the hair and beard and of white paint on the eyes, rare survivals of the bright color used to bring out details on some of the carvings. Although most Assyrian wall carvings now appear a uniform gray, Layard reports that he could distinguish traces of color "on the hair, beard, and eyes, on the sandals and bows, on the tongues of the eagle-headed figures, and very faintly on a garland round the head of a winged priest, and on the representation of fire in the bas-relief of a siege."[22] In addition, he found traces of bright-colored murals fallen from the walls above the panels.

Although carved panels from the Northwest Palace are now scattered across the world in museums and private collections, some remain in the ruins – among them, the throne room relief of which Bowdoin's fragmentary head of the king was once a part. The government of Iraq, proud of the rich history of its homeland, is now in the midst of a project to restore parts of the palace and to make the ancient citadel accessible to the public as a tourist attraction. Someday soon it should be possible for travelers from Bowdoin to retrace the long journey made by the bas-reliefs in the 1850s and to visit Kalḫu, to walk through the ruined corridors of the palace

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20 Possibly the Ninurta Temple north of the palace, as references to Ninurta in the text would suggest: Julian E. Reade, "Twelve Ashurnasirpal Reliefs," *Iraq* 27 (1965), p. 129; James F. Ross, "A Note on the Ashurnasirpal Reliefs at Virginia Theological Seminary," *AfO* 35 (1974/1977), pp. 166-69.

21 Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, p. 22, B-14.

22 Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* II, p. 306.

Assurnasirpal II once described as "the joyful palace, the palace full of wisdom."

Sacred Trees and Date Palms
The Royal Persona of Assurnasirpal II

The tree scene shown in carvings from the Northwest Palace of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) at Nimrūd (ancient Kalḫu) has become one of the classic problems of Assyrian art history.[23] The scene shows two winged figures, sometimes with birds' heads (Pl. 1) and sometimes with the heads of men and the horned hats of gods (Pl. 4). Each of the winged figures holds a bucket and reaches out with an oval object toward a stylized tree-like object between them.

Although there is a long history in Mesopotamian art of scenes involving trees or bushes in a variety of settings, this particular tree scene is distinctive and requires its own interpretation – one that accounts for its distinctive constellation of elements. The signature marks of the scene are the bucket and oval object held by the figures and the peculiarly shaped tree between them, consisting of a central trunk topped by a large palmette with a network of branches leading from the trunk to smaller palmettes forming an arch around the central trunk. Both the scene and the tree itself occur almost exclusively in Assyrian contexts and have, I will argue, a distinctively Assyrian meaning reflecting the political and economic concerns of Assyria in the ninth century B.C., when the scene first achieved prominence in Assyrian art.

The scene was an important motif in Assyrian art in two media: in cylinder seals dating from the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C. and in wall carvings from the Northwest Palace, dedicated by Assurnasirpal II in about 867 B.C. to serve as a government center and royal residence for the new Assyrian capital city of Kalḫu.[24] The tree scene appeared as the main motif in the massive stone carvings lining the walls of the state apartments in the center of the palace. In Room I, for example, the tree itself was depicted ninety-six times, both as part of the scene and as a spacer between tree

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[23] An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the American Oriental Society, Berkeley, California, 3-6 March 1991. I am grateful for the helpful comments of colleagues as I worked on this problem, particularly those of Richard Ellis, R. C. Hunt, Sara Immerwahr, Peter Machinist, David Stronach, and Irene J. Winter.

[24] For this date, see J. E. Reade and J. N. Postgate, "Kalḫu," *RlA,* Bd. 5, pp. 311 and 320. For a similar scene on a ninth century seal, see pl. 33, seal a, in Henri Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (London: Macmillan, 1939), dated to ca. 850 B.C. (p. 190). For later examples, see pl. 117 in Edith Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections: The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library*, Bollingen Series 14 (Washington, D.C.: Pantheon Books, 1948).

scenes, which were the room's sole motif.[25] In other rooms, carvings of the king and his courtiers alternated with carvings of the tree scene, of the tree alone, or of the winged figures with their characteristic apparatus and gesture.[26] The tree scene and its elements dominated the state apartments of the palace, creating a striking visual environment for Assurnasirpal's public appearances. It is the meaning of the scene as it appears in these carvings and the significance of its close association with the figure of the king in this period that is our concern here.

The close relationship of the tree scene to the king is underlined by its use as the focal point of the palace's throne room (Room B in the palace plan, Fig. 1 above), a long hall whose walls were ornamented with bands of small carvings showing the king engaged in hunting and warfare.[27] These small carvings were overshadowed, however, by large carvings of the tree scene placed at two strategic points in the throne room,[28] the first (Fig. 2 above) placed directly opposite the throne room's main entrance, where it was the first thing a visitor saw as he came into the king's presence,[29] and the second (Pl. 33) placed behind and above the throne dais itself, where it framed the king as the visitor turned to face him on his raised throne at the end of the long room.[30] The king himself was depicted in these two carvings, standing between the winged figures and the tree, as if to emphasize his intimate involvement with the scene.

While the importance of the scene in the Northwest Palace is evident, the message it was meant to convey is still debated – somewhat surprisingly, since, for over fifty years, most art historians accepted the interpretation of the scene first proposed by Edward B. Tylor in 1890.[31] Tylor, noting the resemblance of the stylized tree to a date palm, argued that the scene represented an agricultural process essential to raising dates, that is, the artificial pollination of female date palms with pollen from male flower clusters.

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25 For a reconstruction of the original placement of the palace's carvings, see Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I.

26 For example, Room F (Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, pls. 6-7) includes one carving of the king with bird-headed figures and fourteen of the bird-men alone or with the tree. Room G (ibid, pls. 8-10) includes carvings of the king, alone or with courtiers, flanked by winged figures; of the tree alone; and of male figures with a mace or flowers.

27 Ibid., pls. 1-3 and plan 3.

28 The significance of their placement was first noted by Irene J. Winter, in "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), p. 10.

29 Panel B-13 in Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I.

30 Ibid., panel B-23.

31 Edward B. Tylor, "The Winged Figures of the Assyrian and Other Ancient Monuments," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 12 (1890), pp. 383-93.

Tylor's interpretation was widely accepted until C. J. Gadd, in 1948, raised strenuous objections and proposed an alternative interpretation.[32] Rejecting the idea that the stylized tree-like objects resemble date palms, Gadd also observed that some winged figures in the palace extend the oval toward open doorways, toward statues of guardian figures, or toward the figure of the king himself – hardly suitable objects for pollination, Gadd suggested. Concluding that the scene had nothing to do with either date palms or pollination, Gadd proposed instead that the winged figures were somehow deriving a "magic virtue" from the trees, which they transferred to the king or others by smearing them with the oval. Although a few historians still accept the date palm theory, Gadd's objections raised such doubts that by 1961 John Stearns could write in his study of the Northwest Palace that the pollination theory had been largely supplanted.[33] Recent commentators remain cautious about connecting the scene to date palm pollination. Irene J. Winter, for example, in her 1981 study of the throne room, accepts an interpretation of the scene as an "emblem of the provisioning of the land and the role of the king in relation to it" without mentioning date palms.[34] Similarly, Julian Reade, although conceding that the form of the Assyrian stylized tree may be "distantly derived" from the date palm, suggests a resemblance of the oval to both the male date flower cluster and to pine cones, and also points out that some representations of Assyrian stylized trees show them bearing ovals or pomegranates in addition to palmettes, or even in place of them; he therefore interprets the Northwest Palace scene without reference to date palm pollination, describing the stylized tree simply as "a symbol of fertility and the cosmic order upheld by the king."[35]

Such caution might be justified in the case of some Assyrian cylinder seals that show a tree so abstract that its identity as a date palm is indeed ambiguous.[36] In the large carvings in the Northwest Palace, however, the

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32 C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient Near East*, Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1945 (London: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 91-92.

33 John B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnaṣirpal II*, AfO Beiheft 15 (Graz, 1961; rpt. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1984), p. 71. Historians who still accept the date palm pollination theory include, among others, Edith Porada, *Ancient Near Eastern Seals*, vol. 1, pp. 76 and 93, and Samuel M. Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria, 883-859 B.C.* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1976), whose comment on p. 22 implies a cautious acceptance.

34 Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," p. 10.

35 J. E. Reade in Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), frontispiece caption; for discussion, see Julian E. Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* (London: The British Museum, 1983), pp. 27-28.

36 See, for example, seals a, e, f, and h, pl. 33, in Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*; and pls. 92, 94, and 117 in Porada, *Ancient Near Eastern Seals*. The stylized tree of Porada's seal no.

designer seems to have gone to some lengths to present his stylized tree as a date palm, always topping the central trunk with a clearly recognizable palmette and always surrounding the trunk with smaller palmettes, emphasizing the link to date palms. This emphasis suggests that in the Northwest Palace the date palm shape was essential to the Assyrians' understanding of the scene. I propose, then, to defend the old date palm pollination theory, convinced that no other interpretation satisfactorily accounts for both the representation of the tree in the Northwest Palace carvings as a date palm and for the characteristic apparatus – the bucket and oval – that are signature marks of the scene.

It is important in this connection to recognize that the representations of the tree in the Northwest Palace that raise questions about its identity as a date palm are not so much the large images of trees that dominate those carvings but are rather the variants of the tree that appear in the specialized context of small decorative patterns lightly incised on the clothing of some figures in the palace carvings. It is in these decorative embellishments that the tree once lacks a palmette top and in other instances is surrounded by an arch of ovals, rather than palmettes.[37] These stylized trees in clothing decoration may indeed represent the development Reade implied – the creation of "hybrid" stylized trees that were less emphatically linked to date palms in form and were beginning to evolve into images of generic "fruitful trees." These trees in clothing decoration, however, are only a few inches high and are so lightly incised as to be almost invisible, acting as a sort of whispered variation in miniature on the stylized trees in the full-sized carvings that dominate the Northwest Palace and convey its basic message to viewers.

These larger trees, as we have seen, are consistently presented as stylized date palms, and it is this identity that provides a clue to the meaning of the scene and the reason why the bucket and oval appear in it. A United Nations study of date palm cultivation in the modern Near East and Africa, published in 1982,[38] provides a detailed account of modern date palm

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648, for example, is represented by an almost diagrammatic pattern of lines with little resemblance to any natural tree.

37 See, for example, pls. 18b and 19 in Jeanny Vorys Canby, "Decorated Garments in Ashurnasirpal's Sculpture," *Iraq* 33 (1971), pp. 31-53; for a tree with ovals on Assurnasirpal's clothing, see Henri Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 4th ed., rev. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), fig. 41; for a tree with palmettes, pomegranates, and ovals, see J. E. Reade, "A Glazed-brick Panel from Nimrud," *Iraq* 25 (1963), pp. 38-47 and pl. 9.

38 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Date Production and Protection with Special Reference to North Africa and the Near East*, prepared by the Horticultural Crops Groups, Plant Production and Protection Division, based on the work of

pollination techniques; the pollination techniques described there suggest that the ancient carvings not only depicted an actual agricultural process, but did so with remarkable accuracy. The study reports that one common method of pollinating date palms in the Near East is to cut a ripe male flower cluster, carry it up the female tree, and shake it over the female flowers to fertilize them, finally leaving sprigs of the male flower among the female flowers to ensure full fertilization.[39] The male flower clusters are oval in shape (Pl. 7) and bear a marked resemblance to the oval object in the ancient carvings (Pl. 8).

Water also plays a role in the process of pollination. When the male flowers have been collected ahead of time, they may grow dry and are then dipped in water to make them less fragile during pollination; if dried pollen is used instead, it is common practice to sprinkle water over the female flowers after dusting them to keep the pollen from blowing away before complete fertilization occurs.[40] In both cases, a bucket of water is part of the standard apparatus of date palm pollination.

While no description of the techniques of date palm pollination used in ancient Mesopotamia survives, we know from documentary evidence that date palm pollination was indeed practiced in Mesopotamia as early as the Old Babylonian period, and probably earlier, and that it was understood to be important in providing an abundant crop.[41]

It seems reasonable to conclude that the tree scene carved on the walls of Assurnasirpal's palace did indeed represent the pollination of date palms. But what message was the scene meant to convey? Part of the answer, I think, lies in the characteristics of date palms themselves. Dates were an important food in Mesopotamia, rich in calories and easily preserved. Date palms bear fruit abundantly, in heavy clusters, with a single tree often yielding more than one hundred pounds of fruit per year over a productive lifetime of one hundred years or more.[42] It is no wonder that Akkadian

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V. H. W. Dowson, FAO Plant Production and Protection Paper, no. 35 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1982).

39 Ibid., p. 62.

40 Ibid.

41 For references to date palm pollination, see *AHw* s. vv. *rakābu(m)*, G5 and D1, *tarkibtum*, and *tarkubtu(m)* 1; and *CAD* s. v. *išu* 1,2'a'. Law no. 65 in Codex Hammurabi reflects the awareness that failure to pollinate will produce a greatly reduced crop. On hand fertilization and the Akkadian terminology for date palm flower parts, including pollen, see Benno Landsberger, *The Date Palm and Its By-Products According to the Cuneiform Sources*, *AfO* Beiheft 17 (Graz: self-publication by the series editor, 1967), pp. 18-19.

42 In a California study, the weight of fruit borne on single branches of 12-year-old Deglet Noor palms varied from 2.3 to 12.7 kg, or ca. 5-28 lbs. (FAO, *Date Production*, p. 45); 50 lb. clusters of dates on a single branch are not unknown (Paul B. Popenoe, *Date*

synonyms for date palm included "tree of abundance" (*iṣ mašrê*) and "tree of riches" (*iṣ rašê*), appropriate names for a tree that is a natural emblem of agricultural abundance.[43]

A second clue to the meaning of the scene is that the trees that appear in the scene in the Northwest Palace are highly stylized, like no palm trees on earth, while the winged figures are not ordinary farmers but divine beings, probably the minor protective deities known as *apkallus*.[44] Clearly, the scene is not intended to depict a real pollination but depicts instead an act of pollination occurring in the divine sphere (or perhaps a ritual re-enactment of such divine pollination).[45] The scene, for all its links to real agriculture, is in its essence an emblem, representing the gods' gift to mankind of abundant crops and, by extension, of the security agricultural success provides. When the winged figure reaches out with his oval flower cluster toward the figure of the king, he is thus not literally pollinating the king but rather, metaphorically bestowing on him abundance and security as a gift from the gods – a meaning that would have been easily grasped from the

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Growing in the Old World and the New [Altadena, California: West India Gardens, 1913], frontispiece). Female trees begin to bear fruit between the ages of four and twenty years and do so until their death at somewhere between 100 and 150 years of age (FAO, *Date Production*, pp. 35 ff.). Yield per tree varies with variety. In a 1913 study, the average yield per tree in U.S. orchards was 100 pounds per year; in Algeria, for Deglet Noor palms, about 88 pounds; and in Baghdad, 100 pounds or more, with a crop of 300 pounds from a single Zakidi or Barban tree being not unusual (Popenoe, *Date Growing*, p. 163).

43 See *CAD* s. v. *gišimarru* a, e, and f, especially the citations from Hh. III, 237 and 273 f., Lie, *Sargon*, 335, and *ZA* 43, 50:56. See also Landsberger, *Date Palm*, sec. B and commentary.

44 For the physical appearance of *apkallus*, see *CAD* s.vv. *apkallu* 2,e'b and *iṣṣūru* 1e. The text *KAR* 298 gives directions for making plaques depicting *apkallu* figures, including some "with the faces of birds and wings" (l. 12), to be buried beneath the floors of houses as guardians. Such figures have, in fact, been found beneath the floors of palaces at Nimrūd (for example, M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* [London: Collins, 1966], vol. 1, pl. 191 and pp. 226-29). The human-headed figures that replace the bird-headed figures in some Northwest Palace carvings probably represent either a different type of *apkallu* or a similar protective deity.

45 No recognizable description of such a ritual survives in documents, but there is evidence to suggest that the tree scene was eventually enacted as ritual. A Late Assyrian cylinder seal (BM 134770, illustrated in Anthony Green, "A Note on the Assyrian 'Goat-Fish', 'Fish-Man', and 'Fish-Woman'," *Iraq* 48 [1986], pl. 10a) shows a person approaching the stylized tree carrying a bucket and oval and wearing what appears to be a fish suit; he is clearly not a "fish-man," since fish-people, complete with tails, face him across the tree. The depiction of a person in a suit suggests the scene shown on the seal was intended to represent a ritual involving the tree. Moreover, in *KAR* 298:12 and parallel passages, bird-headed *apkallus* are said to carry a "purifier" (*mullilu*) in the right hand and a special "bucket" (*banduddû*) in the left, both usually associated with rituals (see *CAD* s.vv. *mullilu* and *banduddû*). I am grateful to Richard Ellis for bringing this to my attention.

picture because it represented an agricultural process whose consequences were well understood.

There is one problem, however. The choice of date palms as an emblem of agricultural abundance for an Assyrian palace seems strange when one realizes that the Assyrians did not raise date palms as a crop. In the relatively cool climate of Assyria, grains were the staple crop. It was only farther south, in Babylonia, that date palm orchards flourished, providing dates for all Mesopotamia.[46] Was the tree scene borrowed from Babylonian art, despite the uniquely Assyrian form of the stylized tree? Perhaps so, but remarkably few examples of the scene are known from early Babylonia; while stylized trees somewhat resembling date palms appear as garment decoration on figures of two eleventh century Kassite *kudurrus*, the scene as a whole is so far attested only on one Late Kassite cylinder seal.[47] The absence of the scene as a significant element in Babylonian art until well after the period of the Northwest Palace suggests that the motif was originally of minor importance in Babylonia.

What made the Assyrians decide to adopt this obscure Babylonian artistic motif as the dominant theme of Assurnasirpal's palace, when Assyrians themselves did not raise date palms? Again the answer is suggested by the highly stylized form the date palm is given in the scene. Assyrians depicted date palm trees quite naturalistically when they chose to, as in scenes from

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[46] The northern limits of cultivation of date palms for fruit in Iraq and Syria are, along the northeast foothills, the town of Taza Khurmate (35° 18'N), with a few trees as far north as Erbil (36° 15'), occasionally killed by frost; along the Tigris, Samarra (34° 12'), with a few as far north as Tekrit; and along the Euphrates, Rawa (34° 30'N), again with a few exceptions (FAO, *Date Production*, p. xv, table 1). Current scholarly opinion is that climatic conditions in the area were not significantly different in Assyrian times.

[47] For the *kudurrus*, both probably from the reign of Marduk-nādin-aḫḫē (1098-1081 B.C.), see Eva Strommenger and M. Hirmer, *The Art of Mesopotamia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), pls. 270-72, and Ursula Seidl, *Die Babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitäts Verlag, and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989), pl. 27. The seal (Yale Babylonian Collection NCBS 416, formerly Newell 416) shows the figure of a king saluting a palm-like tree while a second figure, wearing a fish suit and carrying a bucket, reaches out toward the tree, whether with an oval or empty-handed is unclear (photo in Hans H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mr. Edward T. Newell*, OIP 22 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934], pl. 28, and drawing in Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals*, fig. 65). Porada (*Ancient Near Eastern Seals*, vol. 1, pp. 641-44), dating it to the Late Kassite period on stylistic grounds, suggests that it is the earliest known example of the tree scene. The appearance of the king in the scene suggests an association of kings with date palms in Kassite Babylonia. The appearance of stylized palm-like trees in the palace decoration of the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208 B.C.) may thus be yet another example of that king's efforts to introduce elements of Babylonian culture into Assyria. The Assyrian king Aššur-rēš-iši (1133-1116 B.C.) reports that he, too, used a date palm motif in his palace decoration. The use of date palm pollination scenes in Assyrian royal iconography, however, seems to begin with Assurnasirpal II.

narrative bas-reliefs in the Northwest Palace itself and in later palaces at Nineveh.[48] But in the pollination scenes in the Northwest Palace, the Assyrians chose instead to depict a highly stylized tree, suggesting, I think, that they conceived of the tree in that scene from the outset as a figural tree, seizing on the idea of the date palm and its pollination precisely because it was not part of their daily agricultural life, but was already at one remove from it and was thus readily transformed in their art into an emblem of agricultural abundance as a divine gift.

A second factor in their choice of date palms as an emblem associated with Assurnasirpal's rule may have been the long established connection of the date palm tree to Ishtar, goddess of sexual fertility, whose association with date palms, even in Assyria, is reflected, for example, in grave goods found near the precincts of the Middle Assyrian Ishtar temple at Assur that are decorated with various images of the goddess and date palm trees, in a later Neo-Assyrian seal showing Ishtar standing on her heraldic lion before a date palm, and in documents such as the Late Assyrian hymn to Ishtar that addresses her as "palm tree, daughter of Nineveh, stag of the lands."[49] Assurnasirpal built three temples to Ishtar during his reign. In choosing to use the date palm as an emblem of agricultural fertility in his palace, he may have been alluding to Ishtar also, adding to the scene additional overtones of her presence as a force for fertility in the world he dominated.[50]

When the king himself is pictured in the scene in the throne room, the message of the carvings is completed (Fig. 2 and Pl. 33). Here it is still the gods who reach out to fertilize the tree, but the king is now represented as

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48 For example, in slab B17, NW Palace (Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, pl. 1) and on bas-reliefs from Sennacherib's palace, Nineveh, figs. 60 and 93 in Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*.

49 For Grave 45 from Assur, see Anton Moortgat, *Die Kunst des alten Mesopotamien: Die Klassische Kunst Vorderasiens* (Cologne: DuMont, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 72-74 and figures. He dates the grave to the fourteenth century and suggests that its occupants were priestesses from the Ishtar temple; grave goods included a comb showing a procession, bordered by date palms and by rosettes, an emblem of Ishtar (fig. 33); an ivory pyxis on which date palms alternate with rosette-bearing conifers (fig. 34); an alabaster vase with a somewhat palm-like stylized tree (fig. 31); and a vase showing a voluptuous goddess with a rosette device on her crown. For the seal, BM 89769, see Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, pl. 119a. The Assurbanipal hymn to Ishtar is translated in A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry,* text 7 (cited above, n. 35).

50 The date palm may have been an emblem associated with other Assyrian gods as well. Posts flanking the entrance to the eighth-century Assyrian temple of Sîn at Khorsabad were decorated with patterns suggesting date palm bark (see Gordon Loud, Henri Frankfort, and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Khorsabad. Part I: Excavations in the Palace and at a City Gate*, OIP 38 [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1936], pp. 98 and 105), and similar patterns decorated engaged columns in the early Assyrian temple at Tell Rimah (see David Oates, "The Excavations at Tell al Rimah, 1966," *Iraq* 29 [1967], pp. 70-79). These date palm patterns, however, may have been simply decorative.

the link between them.[51] The scene becomes a visual metaphor for the king's role as the gods' regent on earth, the conduit through whose actions their gift of abundance could reach Assyria and her empire. The tree scene, dominating the visual world of the palace by its position in the throne room as well as by repetition, emphasized the abundance that Assurnasirpal's rule could provide with the gods' help and was a fitting motif to be associated with the king of a nation that evidently still thought of itself as essentially agricultural and had not yet grasped the full economic implications of its expanding empire.[52]

In the decoration of later Assyrian palaces, the tree scene was to disappear almost entirely. While the winged figures with their bucket and oval remained as echoes of the tree scene, they now appeared almost always without the tree, their protective function no longer explicitly linked to the agricultural activity that had given them their original meaning.[53] In Assur-

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[51] B-23 and B-13 (Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, pls. 1 and 2).

[52] Assurnasirpal's inscriptions make explicit reference to his role as the provider of conditions favorable for agriculture in Assyria, both as builder of a major canal to Nimrūd (called the "Canal of Abundance") and as patron of orchards (A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 2 [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976], CI1, par. 591; CI9, par. 619; and CI14). His role as patron of a royal garden (described in CI14) had a somewhat different significance. David Stronach argues, I think correctly, that Assyrian palace gardens, stocked with exotic plants collected during foreign campaigns, were representations in miniature of distant parts of the empire, and thus emblems of conquest, not of Assyrian agricultural abundance ("Visions of Paradise: Images of the Garden in the Ancient Near East," Leventritt Lecture, 11 April 1991, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University; and "The Garden as a Political Statement: Some Case Studies from the Near East in the First Millennium B.C.," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 [1990], pp. 171-80).

[53] By the time of Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad, the scene had already lost importance, appearing only twice according to the surviving evidence, although winged figures with bucket and oval and a few trees remained as echoes of the scene (Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria* [Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986], p. 57; some carvings from this palace, however, were lost and never recovered). In the palace of Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) at Nineveh, both the tree and the scene are absent, leaving only the winged figures (in Courts H and VI and Room XIV); see John Russell, "Sennacherib's 'Palace without Rival': A Programmatic Study of Texts and Images in a Late Assyrian Palace" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1985), pp. 332 and 360-61. Russell kindly informs me, however, that excavations conducted under the supervision of the Directorate-General of Antiquities of Iraq have recently discovered the remains of a carving in a niche directly opposite the main entrance to the throne room, the same location as that of one tree scene in Assurnasirpal's throne room. While the surviving traces, representing feet, would permit the conclusion that the carving as a whole once represented the tree scene, similarly placed niches in Sargon's palace were bare, and the traces here are so fragmentary as to make any identification highly conjectural. Current evidence suggests that the tree scene disappeared from Assyrian palace decoration after the time of Sargon II, except as garment decoration (see, for example, Moortgat, *Die Kunst*, vol. 2, frontispiece, detail from a relief in Assurbanipal's palace at

banipal's palace at Nineveh, the last great palace of the Assyrian Empire, the tree scene is reserved for decoration on the king's clothing, still intimately connected with the image of the king but now almost completely overshadowed by the wall carvings showing the king as conqueror and as receiver of booty. The emphasis was now on the image of the king as leader of the military campaigns that had gradually replaced agriculture as the foundation of Assyria's now imperial economy. In Assurnasirpal's day, however, Assyria had been poised at the beginning of this transformation, and the walls of his Northwest Palace, surrounding the king with images of date palm pollination, underlined his central role in obtaining from the gods the agricultural abundance on which Assyria's prosperity had for so long depended.

Nineveh). Cf. I. J. Winter's explanation of the near-disappearance of the motif, in "Royal Rhetoric," pp. 26-31.

The Meaning of the Assyrian Tree Image
Iconographic Evidence

Mesopotamian art historians are like forest rangers; they spend much of their professional lives surrounded by trees. Some of the oldest decorated Mesopotamian artifacts known to us represent images of trees or associated shrubbery, and in later times, tree images became a major theme in Mesopotamian art.

It was the Assyrians, in particular, who took this idea and ran with it, developing a highly stylized tree image of their own whose intricate and otherworldly forms suggest that it had for them a complex, emblematic significance. This strange tree, represented in hundreds of variations but with certain persistent elements, became one of the most common motifs of Assyrian art, appearing on cylinder and stamp seals, on ivories, on jewelry, and on the walls of Assyrian royal palaces. It was clearly an image of considerable importance to the Assyrians.

To the great exasperation of Assyriologists, however, we have no clear idea what it meant. In years of combing Assyrian documents, we have failed to discover a single unambiguous reference to such a tree image, much less a full explanation of its meaning. Faced with this deafening silence in the documentary evidence, we have been forced to explain the tree on the basis of iconographic evidence alone. The result has been a series of hypotheses, ranging from Edith Porada's suggestion that the image may represent a date palm orchard, to Julian Reade's proposal that it represents "in some way the fertility of the earth, more especially the land of Ashur."[54] Such hypotheses offer only very general, and somewhat differing, explanations of what is clearly a complex icon; without documentary evidence, it is hard to go further.

Recently, however, Simo Parpola has drawn attention to the existence of later documents that he believes explain the meaning of the Assyrian stylized tree in great detail.[55] These texts, composed hundreds of years after the fall of the Assyrian empire, are medieval Jewish mystical writings that include explanations of the meanings of what they refer to as the Sefirotic

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[54] Edith Porada, "The Palace and Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II," in *The Great King, King of Assyria: Assyrian Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Susanna Hare and Edith Porada, ed. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum, 1946), p. 32; Julian E. Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1983), p. 27.

[55] Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 (1993), pp. 161-208 and *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, SAA 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), pp xv-xxiv.

Tree. This was a tree-like emblem, Parpola explains, that served medieval Judaism as a mystical diagram representing three concepts: the nature of the divinely ordered cosmos; the nature of God; and the nature of the ideal spiritual man. Parpola argues that this tree was directly descended from the earlier Assyrian tree, which, he contends, also served as a mystical diagram representing the nature of the cosmos, the nature of the gods, and the nature of the ideal man – in the Assyrian case, Parpola argues, understood to be the king.

In support of this argument, Parpola points out certain physical resemblances between the two trees and argues that there are also conceptual resemblances between ideas he believes to have been linked to the Assyrian tree and ideas represented by the Sefirotic Tree. Arguing that these physical and conceptual resemblances are so marked and so numerous that they cannot be accidental, he concludes that the Sefirotic Tree is indeed the great-great-grandchild of the Assyrian tree and that ideas born in thirteenth century Assyria, when the Assyrian stylized tree first appeared, were handed down over the centuries relatively unchanged to reappear in the texts explaining the much later Sefirotic Tree. He argues therefore that the Sefirotic Tree of Jewish kabbala offers clues to understanding Assyrian theology, kingship, and even governmental structure.

Parpola's argument is complex and multifaceted. In the brief compass of this paper, I will focus only on the significance of iconographic evidence for evaluating his hypothesis, first outlining the history of stylized tree images in Assyria and then considering the implications of that history for one aspect of Parpola's hypothesis, the idea that the Assyrian tree was understood to be an emblem representing the king as perfect man.

In tracing the history of images of stylized trees in Assyria, I will focus on the stylized tree-like images[56] displayed on the walls of Assyrian palaces, partly because these images (unlike those on most decorative objects) can be dated with considerable precision, but more importantly, because Parpola argues that the meanings of the Assyrian tree he discusses were secret, esoteric lore, known only to a select group of initiates drawn primarily from members of the Assyrian intellectual elite; the emblematic trees represented on royal palace walls, designed and executed under the

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[56] For typical examples on Assyrian seals, see Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, rev. 4th edition, 1969), pls. 76 and 119, and Suzanne Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik der 8.- 7. Jh. v. Chr.*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 1 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992), Tf. 3, 5, 12 and 13; on ivories, André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (New York: Golden Press, 1961), p. 146, Fig. 179 and p. 149, Fig. 183; on jewelry, S. P. M. Harrington, "Royal Treasures of Nimrud," *Archaeology* (July/August 1990), pp. 51-52; and on palace walls, Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Tf. 1-17.

supervision of royal officials, are the tree images most likely to reflect esoteric theological concepts held by such members of the elite.[57]

The stylized Assyrian tree on which Parpola's inquiry focuses is characterized in part by a surrounding arch or circle of fruits or palmettes.[58] The tree in this form makes its first appearance in Assyria in the period of the thirteenth century king Tukulti-Ninurta I as a significant element in the wall decoration of two royal palaces.[59] The stylized trees in these palaces show great variety, some depicted as palms, others resembling cedars and still others bearing pomegranate fruits.[60] By the time of the next extant Assyrian royal palace, that of the ninth century king Assurnasirpal II, the tree image takes on much greater importance, dominating the decorative program of the palace; it is pictured some 210 times on the huge stone panels lining the palace's walls.[61] In these carved panels the tree is given a newly complex form, and Parpola's essays offer explanations based on the kabbalistic tree for many of its elements.

What he does not comment on, however, is the consistent emphasis in this palace on elements that link the stylized tree to date palms. The overall shape of the tree image, its palmette top, and its surrounding arch of palmettes all seem intended to link the image to date palm trees (see Pl. 1 for a typical example).[62] Edith Porada argued plausibly that the network of wavy lines linking the trunk to the surrounding palmettes represents a net-

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57 Seals, ivories, and furniture decoration show a much wider variation in stylized tree images than do the palace wall carvings. These objects, made for a widely assorted clientele of well-to-do Assyrians, in many cases would have been designed by and made for people who were quite unaware of the esoteric meanings that Parpola argues were associated with the tree in the minds of more theologically sophisticated initiates. The images of trees on such objects are thus probably not a reliable guide to possible esoteric interpretations of the tree.

58 Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," n. 6.

59 Stylized tree images from the second millennium are surveyed and pictured in Christine Kepinski, *L'Arbre stylisé en Asie occidentale au 2e millénaire avant J.-C.*, Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Cahier 7 (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Iraq, no. 1, 1982).

60 Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, pl. 74; Kepinski, II, 30, nos. 414 and 415.

61 Two kings from the intervening period, Aššur-rēš-iši I (1133-1116 B.C.) and Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077 B.C.), both describe decorating their palaces with images of date palms; neither palace survives, so the appearance of these tree images is unknown. The number of tree images in Assurnasirpal's palace given here is based on the reconstruction of its decorative program in Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I and in Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II and III.

62 Barbara N. Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52 (1993), p. 133.

work of irrigation canals, and the image as a whole, a well-ordered date palm orchard.[63]

Palm trees, which in some varieties produce one hundred pounds or more of fruit per year hanging in great clusters below the fronds, are a natural image of abundance.[64] The date palm's rich productiveness became a byword in ancient Mesopotamia; synonyms for the date palm in Akkadian include "tree of abundance" (*iṣ mašrê*) and "tree of riches" (*iṣ rašê*).[65] The date palm's great productivity requires agricultural effort, however, and it is one of the steps necessary to make date palms fruitful and productive that the tree scene in Assurnasirpal's palace depicts, albeit in highly stylized form.

An important development in the representation of the tree in this palace was the introduction of a scene in which winged figures holding buckets touch the tree with bumpy oval objects (Pls. 1, 3 and 8). It was known as early as the Old Babylonian period that date palms produce an abundant crop only if they are hand pollinated. A United Nations study of date palm cultivation in the Middle East provides a detailed account of date palm pollination techniques used in the area.[66] The close resemblance of the actions depicted in the scene to the pollination procedures described in the study suggests that the ancient carvings not only depicted an actual agricultural process, but did so with remarkable accuracy. According to the study, a typical procedure for hand pollination in the Near East is to cut a ripe male date palm flower cluster, carry it up the female tree, and shake its pollen over the female flowers. Water also plays a role in the procedure. If the male flowers are collected ahead of time, they often dry out and need to be dipped in water to make them less fragile during pollination. It is also common practice to sprinkle water over the treated female flowers to keep the pollen from being blown away before fertilization occurs.[67] Since the bumpy oval objects in the carvings closely resemble male date palm flower clusters (Pls. 7 and 8), and since a bucket for water is the other object needed for hand pollination, it seems likely that the scene as a whole depicts a symbolic pollination of the tree by the winged figures, who are de-

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63 Porada, "The Palace and Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II," p. 32.

64 Porter, "Sacred Trees," n. 17.

65 *CAD,* s.v. *gišimarru* a, e and d, and Benno Landsberger, *The Date Palm and Its By-Products According to the Cuneiform Sources*, AfO Beiheft 17 (Graz: self-publication by the series editor, 1967), section B and commentary.

66 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Date Production and Protection with Special Reference to North Africa and the Near East,* based on the work of V. H. W. Dowson, FAO Plant Production and Protection Paper, no. 35 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1982).

67 See FAO, *Date Production* and Porter, "Sacred Trees," p. 134.

scribed elsewhere as protective minor divinities called *apkallus*.[68] The scene, grounded in the technology of pollination, represents these minor divinities as the protectors and providers of agricultural abundance, and by extension, as the bestowers of the secure and abundant life that agricultural success provides.

In two carvings prominently displayed in the palace's throne room, the figure of the king is added to the scene (Fig. 2 above and Pl. 33). Placed between the winged figures and the tree, the king becomes a conduit through which the benevolent action of the winged figures must pass to reach the tree. The tree scene in the throne room emphasized the king's crucial role as intermediary between gods and man and as protector and patron of Assyria's agricultural economy. No wonder it was so prominently displayed.

The stylized tree, in a slightly different form, was again prominently displayed in the palace of Assurnasirpal's immediate successor, Shalmaneser III, where it appeared on a huge panel of glazed brick.[69] In later palaces, however, it became steadily less and less prominent. While our knowledge of the next well-preserved palace, that of the eighth century king Sargon II, is incomplete because excavation records and many carvings were destroyed in an accident, surviving drawings of the palace offer a fairly comprehensive survey of its decoration. These drawings indicate that the stylized tree played a minor role in Sargon's palace, appearing only in the corners of three rooms and on both sides of one formal entryway.[70]

It is even more striking that in the palace of Sargon's successor Sennacherib, for which we do have good records, the winged figures appear, but without their tree images, which now seem to have disappeared entirely.[71] The Department of Antiquities of Iraq has recently found a frag-

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[68] A series of Assyrian ritual texts give ritual instructions for making statues of various types of minor divinities and then placing these statues in houses to protect them; among these protective divinities are seven sages (*apkallus*) described as having wings and birds' faces and as carrying buckets and objects referred to as "purifiers" (Porter, "Sacred Trees," n. 19; F. A. M. Wiggerman, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, Cuneiform Monographs 1 [Groningen: Styx and PP, 1992], p. 48, sec. 9.2, and pp. 75 ff.). In their descriptions in the ritual texts, these figures lack trees, but their resemblance to the winged, often bird-headed, bucket-bearing figures depicted in the palace carvings is striking, suggesting the figures in the palace reliefs are *apkallus*.

[69] Julian E. Reade, "A Glazed-Brick Panel from Nimrud," *Iraq* 25 (1963), pp. 38-47, pl. IX.

[70] Paul E. Botta and E. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive*, 5 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1849-50), vol. I, pl. 80; vol. II, pls. 116, 119, 139 and 144; and Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria*, Synthèse no. 22 (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986), pp. 57-58 and pls. 62, 73, 76, 80, 131, and 135.

[71] Winged figures with cone and bucket were still in evidence, but the stylized tree "was completely absent from Sennacherib's palace reliefs" (John Malcolm Russell, *Sennach-*

mented panel from this palace, now preserving only a set of feet, that John Russell argues may once have carried a representation of the entire tree scene; aside from this single hypothetical example, however, there is no evidence in Sennacherib's palace of the stylized tree at all.[72]

The tree makes one last palace appearance in the final days of the empire in the palace of Sennacherib's grandson Assurbanipal, but it is shown there rarely and in miniature, appearing only as a decorative motif lightly etched on the king's clothing.[73] The 210 large trees of Assurnasirpal's palace carvings have been reduced by the end of the empire to an occasional decorative clothing motif. This deforestation of Assyrian palaces requires some explanation.[74]

I would suggest that the stylized tree's loss of prominence in late palaces was directly tied to its original function as an emblem of agricultural abundance. Assyria, now an imperial power, was growing less dependent on her own agriculture and more dependent on tribute and booty for her economic prosperity. Maintaining that prosperity through force of arms was now the king's main responsibility, and later palace iconography reflects this, surrounding the king with scenes of warfare and not with trees.[75] The stylized tree, once a prominent motif in Assyrian palaces, became less and less important in royal iconography because Assyria's economy was changing, and the tree, strongly linked to ideas of agricultural abundance, no longer reflected the Assyrians' central concerns.

It is significant that the winged figures once associated with the tree nevertheless continue to appear alone in palaces. Although they still carry the characteristic apparatus used in pollination, the apparatus has by this time evidently acquired a secondary function independent of the tree. This is suggested by a set of Neo-Assyrian ritual instruction texts that give directions for making statues of various protective minor divinities to be

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crib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh [Chicago and London: U. of Chicago Press, 1991], p. 181).

72 Porter, "Sacred Trees," n. 28.

73 Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace*, p. 313, n. 34; F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, with illustrations selected by J. E. Reade, *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration,* SAA 7 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1992), Fig. 27.

74 For a different explanation, see I. J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), pp. 26-31.

75 The decorative programs of the later palaces of Sargon, Sennacherib, and Assurbanipal are discussed in Albenda, *Palace of Sargon* ; Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace*; and R. D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668-627 B.C.)* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1976).

buried in houses to provide divine protection from misfortune.[76] The divinities described in these texts include winged bird-headed figures that appear identical to those of the palace carvings. In these texts, the figures are said to carry a *banduddû* (a type of bucket used in rituals) and a *mullilu* ("purifier" or "cleanser"), evidently the bumpy oval object that in the earlier tree scenes was extended toward the tree. The reference to the oval as a purifier and to the bucket as an object typically used in rituals suggests that the figures, referred to in these texts as "guardians," now operate primarily to provide protection from evil through ritual purification. The figures' initial link to a specifically agricultural benefit has evidently by this time been set aside, along with the tree itself, in favor of a role linked to protection through purification, an idea probably derived from the water in the bucket and its traditional purifying function in rituals. Only the flower-cluster shape of the oval object and the figures' odd gesture remain to link the figures to the earlier tree scenes with their connotations of agricultural abundance.

The near disappearance of the tree itself in late palaces is readily explained in light of the tree's agricultural connotations, as I have suggested, and this interpretation of the tree image is not too different from Parpola's hypothesis that the Assyrian tree, like the Sefirotic Tree, represented the divinely ordered cosmos. Parpola, however, argues that the Assyrian tree, like the Sefirotic one, had two additional meanings: that it represented the unity of the gods, and that it represented the Assyrian king himself in the role of "perfect man," or *eṭlum gitmālum*.[77] In this latter function, he suggests, the tree portrayed the king as "the perfect image of God" and thus "justified the king's position as the absolute ruler of the empire."[78] But if the tree had this third meaning, and with it, the important political role of justifying to the intellectual elite the king's exercise of absolute power, why did it lose its prominence in palaces in the later years of the empire? Its near

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[76] Wiggerman, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits* (cited above, n. 68). The earliest dateable manuscript of these texts is dated to the eponymy of Bēl-dan in 750 B.C. A second dated manuscript consisting of extracts from the text was written, according to its colophon, by Kiṣir-Aššur, a well-known exorcist from the reign of Assurbanipal (668-627 B.C.). The other extant manuscripts are Neo-Assyrian in sign form but cannot be precisely dated, although many come from the famous text collection assembled by Assurbanipal. The relative lateness of the two dated manuscripts suggests that the identification of the oval object carried by the figures as a "purifier" may itself have been a relatively late development. It is possible, however, that even at the time of the construction of Assurnasirpal's palace, the figures were already seen as not only magically "pollinating" and thus metonymically bestowing abundance and a good life, but also as protectively "purifying" through their use of water, which may have been their main role in later palaces.

[77] Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," pp. 167-8 and n. 34.

[78] Parpola, *Letters*, pp. xv and 168.

disappearance casts doubt on the idea that the tree represented the king himself and was identified with him.

Parpola's theory that the tree was identified with the king rests in part on the argument that in certain scenes in Assurnasirpal's palace, the king is represented in place of the tree and is thus in effect identified with it iconographically.[79] But there are problems with this interpretation of the scenes. In many carvings from Assurnasirpal's palace, the king did indeed replace the tree as the object of the winged figures' gesture – but so did his courtiers and anyone else who passed through the doorways of the palace toward which the winged figures extended their bumpy oval objects.[80] Are we to conclude that all the people who went through these doors were identified with both king and tree? Probably not. It seems more reasonable to conclude that king, tree, and visitors to the palace were all understood to be recipients of the same divine protection and blessing, expressed in a gesture that originally represented the bestowal of agricultural fruitfulness, and by extension, the bestowal of an abundant and secure life. These images do not imply that the king was identified with the stylized tree.

Several representations of the tree in Assurnasirpal's palace carvings, in fact, suggest the opposite. The two prominently displayed throne room carvings mentioned above (Fig. 2 and Pl. 33) in which the king is included in the tree scene, as well as two small scenes lightly etched as decorative motifs on royal clothing in the carvings, depict the king standing on both sides of the tree image, an arrangement that represents king and tree as separate entities, although closely related.[81] These scenes, together with the tree image's loss of prominence in late Assyrian palaces, argue against the

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79 Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," p. 167, n. 31 and Fig. 4.

80 For examples of carvings in which the king appears as the recipient of the gesture, see Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Tf. 6, panels F-3 and F-4; Tf. 8, panels G-11, G-12, G-14; and Tf. 16, panels N-5, N-6 and N-7; for courtiers as recipients of the gesture, Tf. 8, panels G-2 to G-4; and for doorway openings flanked by the winged figure with extended oval, Tf. 3, panels B-1 to B-32; Tf. 9, panel G-27; Tf. 10, panels G-d-1 to G-d-2, and Tf. 17, panels P-2 to P-3.

81 For the large carvings, see Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," Fig. 3; for clothing motifs, see Jeanny Vorys Canby, "Decorated Garments in Ashurnasirpal's Sculpture," *Iraq* 33 (1971), pp. 31-53, pl. xviii (a detail of an Assurnasirpal palace carving in the Dartmouth College Museum) and pl. xix (a detail of an Assurnasirpal carving in the British Museum, BM 124565). Canby notes, however, that these small decorative elements differ from the representation of the same motifs in larger form in the palace carvings and suggests their appearance may reflect the cultural concepts and visual traditions of foreign carvers working on the palace, rather than those of native Assyrian artists and their supervisors.

proposition that the stylized tree image represented the Assyrian king himself.[82]

In Parpola's argument, however, the identification of king and stylized tree in Assyria is one of three main conceptual resemblances linking the Assyrian tree to the later kabbalistic one. If this central element of the kabbalistic tree's meaning was absent from the meanings of the Assyrian tree, as the iconographic evidence suggests, it would seem either that the later tree image may not be a descendant of the Assyrian tree after all, or else that significant changes and additions had occurred in the meaning of the tree image by the time of its reemergence as an icon of medieval Jewish mysticism. In either case, explanations of the Assyrian tree, and of Assyrian concepts in general, derived from meanings of the later Sefirotic Tree must be viewed with considerable skepticism.

Are we then back where we began? Not really. Although the tree images of medieval Jewish kabbala may not be a reliable guide to the meanings of the earlier stylized tree images of Assyrian palaces, Parpola, in attempting to establish a direct connection between the two images, has offered us perceptive analyses of the Assyrian evidence relating to theology, royal ideology, and a host of other topics. If his interpretation of some aspects of the stylized trees of Assyrian palace carving remains problematic, he has nevertheless provided us with insights into the world of ancient Assyria that will shape our understanding for years to come.

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[82] As Parpola notes, some lexical lists cite both 'date palm' (*gišimmaru*) and 'boxwood tree' (*taskarinnu*) as synonyms for 'king' (*šarru*); for references, see *CAD*, s.v. *šarru* and *AHw*, s.v. *taskarinnu(m)*. As in the case of the word 'bull', another synonym for 'king', the point appears to be that kings have the qualities of such animals or trees (in the case of the date palm, the metaphor may characterize kings as generous providers, for example), but not that all bulls, boxwood trees, date palms, and date palm-like images, are to be identified with the king or to be understood as representing him. The visual contexts in which the stylized trees were presented in Assyrian palaces, and their gradual disappearance from such palaces, both suggest that the stylized tree images in palaces were not understood as visual metaphors for the king.

Seasonal Time and Eternity in Ancient Assyria
Winged Genie Fertilizing a Date Tree

> Palace of Assurnasirpal, vice-regent of (the god) Assur . . ., destructive weapon of the gods, strong king, king of the universe . . . , who by his lordly conflict has brought under one authority ferocious (and) merciless kings from east to west: the ancient city Kalḫu which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria . . . , who preceded me, had built . . ., I rebuilt . . .; I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, *daprānu*-juniper, boxwood . . . as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for all eternity.[83]

In 870 B.C., the winged figure that today confronts visitors to the Nelson-Atkins Museum (Pl. 9) guarded a doorway deep within the palace of King Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (883-859 B.C.) in his new capital at Kalḫu (biblical Calah, modern Nimrūd).[84] The inscription excerpted above, carved in cuneiform signs across the figure, identified Assurnasirpal as the palace's builder and summarized the conquests that had made him, if not quite "king of the universe" as he claimed, certainly master of a huge empire stretching across the Middle East. This text, carved more than 400 times on stone panels covering the palace's walls and floors,[85] transformed the building

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[83] Excerpted from the so-called "Standard Inscription" of Assurnasirpal, published in A. Kirk Grayson, ed., *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC, I (1114-859 BC)*, RIMA 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 268-76. In citing the passage, I have replaced "Calah," the biblical name of the city used by Grayson, with "Kalḫu," the Assyrian name of the city and the name actually used in the inscription.

[84] The Nelson-Atkins Museum bas-relief (panel L10 in Meuszyński's *Rekonstruktion* I, Tf. 14 and pp. 64-71) stood in a wide corridor in an area probably used for ritual bathing (see Russell, below, pp. 671-697, esp. 696). The original placement of the carvings in the palace has been reconstructed, with drawings, in three volumes: Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I; Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II and III. The placement of the carvings is perceptively discussed, with extensive bibliography, by John Malcolm Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 102 (1998), pp. 655-715.

[85] Grayson lists 406 exemplars (*Assyrian Rulers* I, pp. 268-74). For their placement and variants, see John Malcolm Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999), pp. 9-41.

into a kind of massive time capsule designed to preserve Assurnasirpal's name and achievements so long as the palace stood, which the text asserts would be "for all eternity."

The preoccupation with time as destroyer that this elaborate and expensive effort to preserve the king's name and achievements implies was characteristic of Assyrian kings, whose inscriptions, in many cases buried in multiple copies beneath temples and palaces, tell us they were intended to preserve the renown of their patron kings "to far-off days" and which curse future rulers if they should fail to read and preserve them. Assurnasirpal himself, in another inscription, exhorts future kings to protect his palace and its precious inscription:

> May a later prince restore its (the palace's) weakened (portions and) restore my inscribed name to its place. (Then the god) Assur will listen to his prayers. He must not forsake my mighty palace, my royal residence, of Kalḫu, nor abandon (it) in the face of enemies. He must not remove the doors (or) beams . . . (and) put them in another city (in) another palace . . . He must not allow it to disintegrate. . . .

Any king who disregarded these instructions was to perish, along with the monuments preserving *his* memory:

> As for the one who does not act according to this inscription of mine, (but) alters the ordinances of my text, (who) destroys this monument . . . (or) prevents scholars from seeing and reading the ordinances of my inscription . . . may Assur, the great lord, the Assyrian god, lord of destinies, curse his destiny; may he remove his works; may he pronounce an evil curse for the uprooting of the foundations of his sovereignty. . . .[86]

[86] From the "Great Monolith Inscription" on a stele beside the temple adjoining the palace: Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers* I, pp. 237 ff.

Clearly, mortality was on Assurnasirpal's mind, and his palace inscription, carved over and over again in stone, was part of a determined effort to preserve his name from the ravages of time.

The Assyrian concept of time as destroyer that this reflects stands in contrast to the concept of cyclic time, rooted in the recurring patterns of the astronomical and agricultural year, that is reflected in Assyria's calendar.[87] Like our own calendar, it consisted of twelve lunar months, which each began when astronomers first glimpsed the new moon and which were lengthened periodically to fill out the slightly longer solar year. Although predominantly astronomical, the Assyrian year was linked to agricultural cycles, as well; its beginning, celebrated by a national festival known as the *akītu*, came at the spring equinox, but also marked preparations for the harvest, and a second *akītu*, punctuating the year midway, came at the fall equinox but also marked preparations for plowing and planting before the winter rains inaugurated the growing season.[88]

But this calendar, rooted in the reassuringly recurring cycles of the astronomical and agricultural year, was not Assyrian, but adopted – a legacy from Babylonia, located farther south on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, where irrigation, warmth, and fertile soil combined to produce the strikingly abundant crops of dates for which southern Iraq is still renowned. The sense of time as a continuum of repeating cycles, reflected in the Assyrian's borrowed calendar, was perhaps shaped by the Babylonians' relatively benign environment, which regularly produced abundant harvests so long as governments maintained the irrigation systems on which southern agriculture depended.[89] Although the Assyrians also were bound to the seasons of an agricultural year, they experienced them in a more threatening and precarious context. Deeply cut northern rivers made irrigation in many areas difficult, leaving farmers largely dependent on rainfall for the survival of the grain crops on which Assyria depended, a rainfall that in northern Iraq is not only marginal but erratic, periodically arriving too late in winter to keep emerging seedlings alive.[90] Ironically, rain itself is an addi-

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87 On Mesopotamian calendars and the calendar used in Assyria, see Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 1993), pp. 3-13.

88 Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, pp. 305-09 and 326-30. On the Assyrian agricultural year, see H. W. F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), pp. 162-65.

89 On the contrasting climate and vegetation of the two regions, see Denis Baly and A. D. Tushingham, *Atlas of the Biblical World* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 34-37, and on Babylonia's abundant date crops, pl. XI.

90 For A. H. Layard's vivid description of such a year, see Saggs, *Might That Was Assyria*, p. 163.

tional danger in northern Iraq, where unpredictable mountain storms can create flashfloods in spring, destroying crops and villages.[91] Perhaps because of this unpredictable environment, the cyclical vision of time reflected in the Assyrians' adopted calendar is persistently overshadowed in their texts and visual imagery by a contrasting vision of time as an annihilator, threatening name and memory. It is this concept of time whose shadow touches the winged figures of Assurnasirpal's carvings and shapes his palace's visual imagery.

In its original setting, our winged figure was part of a scene (completed on a second panel now in a museum in Hanover, Germany) in which it faced a second winged figure with bucket who also extended an oval object toward the tree-like object standing between them. This consisted of a trunk topped by a palmette and surrounded by an arc of smaller palmettes, linked to the trunk by a network of wavy lines (as in Pl. 1, a version of the scene in which the winged figures have the heads of birds).[92] The tree-like objects, although frequently depicted in Assyrian art, are never mentioned in texts; their meaning, and that of the scene as a whole, is still debated.[93]

The scene, however, offers significant clues. To begin with, the central trunk with palmette top is clearly a stylized date palm, known as the "tree of riches" and the "tree of abundance" in Mesopotamia.[94] The surrounding palmettes underline the scene's connection to these trees. It has been argued that the wavy lines represent a network of irrigation canals, and the image

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91 On these sudden and disastrous Tigris floods, see Baly and Tushingham, *Atlas*, pp. 82-83 and pl. 7. Harvey S. Smith, et al., *The Area Handbook for Iraq* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969) reports that during spring flooding the Tigris and Euphrates "may carry 40 times as much water as at low mark," and that "one season's flood may be 10 or more times as great as that in another year" (p. 19); in the north, these floods come without warning. *The Economic Development of Iraq*, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1952) commented in its report on flood control projects proposed for Iraq in the early 1950s that "destructive spring floods are apt to occur just before the harvesting of the winter crops begins and as the planting of summer crops is in process." The study concluded that even with modern technologies, topographical difficulties would prevent extensive irrigation of the north, and sub-marginal rainfall would continue to make settlement and agriculture in much of northern Iraq impracticable (pp. 12-13).

92 For a drawing of the two adjacent panels, see Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Tf. 14, panels L10-11.

93 For recent discussions, each drawing differing conclusions, see Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 no. 3 (1993), pp. 161-208; Barbara N. Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52, no. 2 (1993), pp. 129-139 (reprinted here); and Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," each with further bibliography.

94 Porter, "Sacred Trees," p. 134.

as a whole, a palm garden, perhaps representing the empire as fruitful garden, an image evoked in one of Assurnasirpal's inscriptions.[95]

The winged figures and their paraphernalia offer further clues. To produce an abundant crop, date palms must be pollinated by hand, and the objects held by the winged figures recall this process: the bumpy oval resembles the male date flower clusters shaken over female flowers during pollination, while the bucket recalls the water that is often sprinkled over the flower to hold the pollen in place.[96] The scene, in other words, represents the action necessary to make date palm orchards fruitful. The winged figures, whose horned caps identify them as gods, are no ordinary farmers; in their hands the gesture of pollination becomes one of divine blessing, conferring abundance on the world, a metaphorical reading of the gesture also suggested by the presence of such winged figures extending their flower clusters toward the palace's doorways, metaphorically conferring productiveness and abundance on all who pass through.

The pollination scene is repeated eleven times in the room in which our figure stood, and ninety-eight times in the palace as a whole.[97] The repeated scenes formed a striking visual backdrop for the king's public appearances, insistently informing Assyrians and foreign visitors alike that Assurnasirpal was surrounded by powerful deities who continually blessed and protected the world he dominated. In the throne room, the king himself appears in the

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95 The idea that the "tree" might "stand for a group or grove of palms," was first proposed by Edward B. Tylor, "The Winged Figures of the Assyrian and Other Monuments," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 12 (1890), p. 384. W. Andrae, *Coloured Ceramics from Assur* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1925), p. 5, suggested that the tree represents "the idea of a palm grove with a brook flowing through it." Edith Porada developed this suggestion, proposing that the "branches" be understood as "undulating water courses" surrounding the tree "in the manner of irrigation canals" and that the small palmettes be understood as offshoots: Porada, "The Palace and Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II," in *The Great King, King of Assyria: Assyrian Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Susanna Hare and Edith Porada, ed., (New York: The Metropolitan Museum, 1946), pp. 17-20. Julian Reade, among others, advances the idea of the treelike objects as "representing in some way the fertility of the earth, more especially the land of Ashur": Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1983), p. 27. On royal gardens as emblems of the empire as a whole, see David Stronach, "The Garden as a Political Statement: Some Case Studies from the Near East in the First Millennium B.C.," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 4 (1990), pp. 171-80. For Assurnasirpal's description of the empire as a garden and of his royal garden as an emblem of that abundant empire, see Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers* I, no. 30 (the "Banquet Stele"), p. 290, lines 36b-52.

96 Porter, "Sacred Trees," p. 134. Tylor first interpreted the scene as date pollination, an idea also advanced by Porada (above, n. 33).

97 My rough estimate, based on the reconstructions proposed in Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I and Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II.

scenes of blessing;[98] standing with raised hand between the winged figures and the tree, he is portrayed here as the conduit through whom the gods' blessings reach the world, an idea that offered a strong incentive for supporting the king rather than assassinating him or rebelling, and thus provided him with a very practical hedge against mortality.

But the carvings were probably more than visual propaganda supporting the king; a group of Assyrian magical texts suggests that the winged figures were understood to be living guardians, brought to life by rituals and charged with the protection of king and palace. The texts give instructions for making statues or clay plaques representing various protective deities ("the hairy one," "the bison-man," and so on) that were to be buried under houses as protectors against the malevolent demons, ghosts, and offended gods whom Assyrians believed to cause illness and misfortune. One such deity described in the texts, the *apkallu*, matches the appearance of the bird-headed winged figures often substituted for the human-headed winged figures in the Northwest Palace pollination scenes (Pl. 1), an interchange suggesting both types of figures were understood to be *apkallu* deities. In a later palace, a panel carved with such an image also carried a quotation from these magical texts, suggesting that the carved figures in palaces, like the buried wood or clay images described in the texts, had been ritually animated and were then considered to be not just images but living gods, charged with eternally purifying and protecting the king and his palace.[99]

Assurnasirpal's choice of *apkallu*s to be his protectors is significant. In Mesopotamian tradition, the *apkallu*s were originally sages who lived be-

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[98] Porter, "Sacred Trees," pp. 138-39. Cf. I. J. Winter's pioneering discussion of the throne room's iconography, which interpreted the scene without reference to date palms, suggesting it was an "emblem of the provisioning of the land and the role of the king in relation to it": Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), p. 10. Cf. also Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," pp. 691 ff., arguing that the stylized tree was not "the recipient of beneficial attention, but rather . . . a powerful apotropaic agency in its own right."

[99] F.A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, Cuneiform Monographs I (Groningen: Styx and PP Publications, 1992), especially text I, lines 170 ff., and p. 48, "Bird-*apkullu*." On the ritual animation of statues and visual images of kings, see I. J. Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (1992), pp. 13-42. On the function of Assurnasirpal's palace carvings as magical guardians, see Barbara Parker Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual in the Northwest Palace Reliefs," in *Essays on Near Eastern Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, P. O. Harper and H. Pittman, ed. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), pp. 33-39 and Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," pp. 691-96. Despite Russell's comments, it seems likely that the figures functioned in the palace *both* as magical guardians and as deities blessing the empire and its subjects with abundance.

fore the Flood,[100] a legendary event as much celebrated in ancient Mesopotamia as in our own traditions; the choice of these divine figures, renowned for their antiquity and longevity, to guard the palace underlines Assurnasirpal's determination that it should stand forever, preserving a record of his achievements for all time.

In one sense, Assurnasirpal's effort to defeat time-the-destroyer has succeeded startlingly well. Today, almost three millennia later, visitors to the Nelson-Atkins Museum are still told of Assurnasirpal's name, and the inscription recounting his achievements, carved in stone, still stands under the protection of its ancient guardian. But this is surely not immortality as Assurnasirpal had envisioned it. Some 250 years after his death, the Assyrian empire fell to its enemies. His palace, intended to stand "for all time," was burned, abandoned and for thousands of years forgotten; today it is an excavated ruin in a war-torn country. Only its carvings, scattered across the world, remain as a haunting reminder of Assurnasirpal's dream, still unfulfilled, of a world of abundance and order for all mankind.

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[100] "Seven Sages," in *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesoppotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, J. Black and A. Green, ed. (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1992), pp. 163-64 and Fig. 11, p. 18.

Conquest or *Kudurrus*? Peaceful Strategies of Assyrian Government

One of the more curious objects to come down to us from the reign of Esarhaddon of Assyria (681-669 B.C.) is a roughly rectangular black stone, 21.5 cm. high, carved on its top with two rows of stylized images arranged in a recessed square frame, and inscribed on its sides with a text commemorating Esarhaddon's attentions to the city of Babylon. This object, known as the Black Stone of Lord Aberdeen, after the donor who presented it to the British Museum, is an anomaly among Assyrian royal inscriptions, as we will see, both in its text and even more strikingly in the form of the object on which the text is inscribed. Its shape, decoration and material are reminiscent not of Assyrian building inscriptions but of Babylonian *kudurrus*, documents used in Babylonia as formal records of grants of land or other privileges. The question I would like to address here is whether the Black Stone is indeed in some sense a *kudurru*, and if so, why Esarhaddon, an Assyrian king ruling a recently conquered Babylonia, chose this unusual form for his inscription, evoking a traditional Babylonian genre, albeit in modified form. The answer to this question reveals some interesting things about Esarhaddon's Babylonian policy and about Assyrian strategies for governing conquered peoples.

The clues to understanding the Black Stone and its function in Esarhaddon's Babylonian policy lie both in the the text and the object on which it is inscribed. Since William W. Hallo in his essay on the typology of Ur III texts demonstrated the importance of considering text and object together as related elements, both essential to understanding the function of a given document or genre,[101] it seems appropriate to dedicate this brief study to him, in partial thanks for the encouragement and generous help he has given to me and to many other Assyriologists over the years.

The first clues to understanding the intended function of the Black Stone lie in the text inscribed on it. This text is one of a group of inscriptions commemorating Esarhaddon's extensive reconstruction work on the city of Babylon, which had been heavily damaged in 689 B.C. (shortly before Esarhaddon's reign) during his father Sennacherib's reconquest of Babylonia. The inscriptions commemorating Esarhaddon's work on Babylon seem at first glance so similar in form and content that they were published by Riekele Borger in his edition of Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions as a

[101] William W. Hallo, "The Royal Inscriptions of Ur: A Typology," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 33 (1962), pp. 1-43.

single, composite text with variants, a text Borger refers to as Babylon A-G.[102] These Babylon inscriptions of Esarhaddon, however, show on closer analysis some significant differences, and the text inscribed on the Black Stone (the Babylon D text in Borger's system) proves to be in fact unique, not only different from Esarhaddon's other inscriptions describing work at Babylon, but an anomaly among Assyrian royal inscriptions in general.

All of the texts, Babylon D included, begin by listing various misdeeds of the Babylonians that the texts assert had brought on the city's destruction. The texts then turn to a description of the steps leading to the city's rebuilding: omens from the gods encouraging reconstruction of the city, the calling up of workers for the project, the ceremonial laying of new foundations for the damaged temple Esagila, and the making of bricks in preparation for its rebuilding. When their accounts reach the actual rebuilding, however, differences between Babylon D and the other texts begin to emerge. The other texts, following the pattern of conventional Assyrian building inscriptions, now describe the actual reconstruction of the Esagila temple at some length, even listing the kind of wood used for its doors and the vessels with which it was equipped, and follow this with a brief summary of other building projects and favors for the city. The texts end with a detailed description of the deposit in Esagila of the documents commemorating its reconstruction, concluding with blessings and curses designed to encourage the proper future care of those documents. We have no excavated provenance for these texts, but since almost all of them are inscribed on clay prisms, a form typical of Assyrian building deposit texts, and since the conclusion of the texts focuses on the deposit of such documents, it seems likely that most of these texts are themselves the foundation documents they describe. The Babylon D text, in contrast, summarizes the actual reconstruction and re-equipping of Esagila and the reconstruction of the city's walls in twelve short lines. It makes no reference to the deposit of documents, but instead concludes with the report that Esarhaddon had returned to Babylon those citizens who had been deported into slavery, end-

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[102] Borger, *IAK*. For revisions and supplements to the Babylon inscriptions published by Borger, see also Riekele Borger, "Zu den Asarhaddon-Texten aus Babel," *BiOr* 21 (1964), pp. 143-148; ibid., "Die Neue Asarhaddon-Text AfO 18, S. 314 ff.," *AfO* 19 (1959-60), p. 148; Mordechai Cogan, "New Additions to the Corpus of Esarhaddon Historical Inscriptions," *AfO* 31 (1984), p. 75; A. R. Millard, "Some Esarhaddon Fragments Relating to the Restoration of Babylon," *AfO* 24 (1973), pp. 117-119 and pls. XIII-IV; Jean Nougayrol, "Nouveau fragment de prisme d'Asarhaddon relatant la restauration de Babylone," *AfO* 18 (1958), pp. 314-318; T. J. Pinches, *CT* 44 (London: British Museum, 1963), nos. 3-9; and Akio Tsukimoto, "A New Esarhaddon Prism Fragment Concerning the Restoration of Babylon," *Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project* 8 (1990), pp. 63-69.

ing with the announcement in its final lines that Esarhaddon would now restore to Babylon the privileges and freedoms conferred by *kidinnūtu* status, a status whose nature is not entirely clear, but which seems to include both protection from physical violence and freedom from certain taxes and duties.[103] This concluding emphasis on privileges rather than building is uncharacteristic of Assyrian building inscriptions but recalls Babylonian *kudurru* texts, which the Black Stone also resembles physically, as we will see.

Kudurrus are stone (or, more rarely, clay) objects inscribed with texts recording the granting of land or associated tax exemptions, usually by the king; they make their first appearance in fourteenth century Babylonia, are common there in the Kassite period and shortly thereafter, particularly between ca. 1307-1047, and continue to appear in Babylonia, in diminishing numbers, until the middle of the seventh century.[104] Their most common physical form is an irregular cone or pyramid, usually of black stone, engraved with divine symbols, a format that continued in use over the entire time range. J. A. Brinkman notes that *kudurrus* are not legal documents, since they lack witnesses and sealings; he suggests they were made by the person receiving the grant and that their purpose was to strengthen the grant by putting it under the special protection of the gods, who were invoked by the symbols carved on the stone, by the curses that end the text, and by the deposit of the *kudurru* in a temple.[105]

Although the Babylon D text inscribed on the Black Stone does not resemble *kudurru* texts in literary form, it does resemble them in function, as a formal record of a royal grant of privileges.[106] Even more striking than the resemblance in function, however, is the Black Stone's physical resemblance to *kudurru* documents. To begin with, it is made of black limestone, the material most frequently used for *kudurrus* but one not attested for As-

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[103] This grant of privileges is reported in Babylon A, C, and F, as well; the various accounts are published by Borger as Episode 37, pp. 25-26. *Kidinnūtu* status is a protected status, apparently granted within certain physical boundaries, such as within a given city, and is associated with divine protection.

[104] I follow here J. A. Brinkman, "Kudurru," *RlA* 6, pp. 267-274.

[105] Brinkman, p. 270.

[106] The Black Stone was found in Nineveh (IR 49), unlike most of the other Babylon inscriptions, which were found or bought in the vicinity of Babylon itself. This provenance lends support to the hypothesis that the Black Stone was not a building inscription meant for deposit in Babylon. I am tempted to think that the text may have been taken to Nineveh for deposit in a temple, deliberately echoing the Babylonian procedure for dealing with *kudurrus*; with no precise provenance in Nineveh recorded for the Black Stone, however, this remains entirely conjectural.

syrian royal inscriptions.[107] While this choice of material in itself recalls *kudurrus*, it is the carving of symbols, or stylized images, on the top of the Black Stone that makes its creator's intention to evoke Babylonian *kudurrus* unmistakable. The images carved on the stone (Pl. 10) include a horned crown resting on an altar and approached by a worshipper; an Assyrian stylized tree; a striding bull; a hill; a date palm tree; a seed plow; and a square with circles at its four corners. They are arranged in two rows and bear a striking similarity to the carved symbols of gods that are the signature mark of *kudurrus*.

It seems clear, both from its physical appearance and from its focus on granting privileges rather than on building activities, that the Black Stone was not an Assyrian building inscription at all, but was rather a deliberate anomaly, a document meant to recall a traditional Babylonian text type, the *kudurru*. In this regard, the Black Stone appears as one element of an elaborate public relations program that Esarhaddon developed in his early years of reign to win support for his rule in Babylonia by systematically presenting to the Babylonians the image of himself as a genuinely Babylonian king, a ruler who would preserve the forms of Babylonian kingship in his own person, albeit without in any way diminishing his simultaneous (and paramount) role as king of Assyria and ruler of her empire. In order to present to Babylonians the *persona* of a Babylonian king, Esarhaddon adopted Babylonian royal ritual and titulary, assumed the building responsibilities which were traditionally of central importance in Babylonian kingship, invoked Babylonian gods as his patrons in documents written for presentation in Babylonia, and commissioned royal inscriptions especially designed to appeal to Babylonian audiences. The Babylon D text appears to be just such a document, written to commemorate the king's restoration of privileges to the city of Babylon. By evoking the traditional Babylonian genre of the *kudurru* in the very form of the object on which the text was inscribed, Esarhaddon was underlining in a tangible way the basic message of the text itself, that under his benevolent rule, Babylonian traditions and Babylonian national identity would be to some extent preserved.

But this was only half of the message that the Black Stone was meant to convey. Although the Black Stone recalls the *kudurru* form and is, like a *kudurru*, a record of the grant of special privileges by the king, it nevertheless differs in several important ways from a traditional Babylonian

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[107] For the materials from which *kudurrus* were made, see Ursula Seidl, *Die babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs: Symbole mesopotamischer Gottheiten*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 87 (Freiburg, Schweiz: Univ.-Verlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989), pp. 68-69. I am indebted to J. E. Reade of the British Museum for the information that the Black Stone is probably made of black limestone rather than of black basalt, as had previously been thought.

kudurru. These differences, I would argue, are crucial to understanding the document because they impose an unmistakably Assyrian stamp on the traditional Babylonian form, adding an important qualification to the message the Black Stone was intended to convey to the Babylonians. The text on the Black Stone, for example, rather than being a typical *kudurru* text devoted to specifying the details of a grant and protecting it by curses, is instead hardly distinguishable from an Assyrian building inscription; it differs only in the brevity of its building account and in its unusual conclusion reporting the grant of privileges rather than the completion of a building project. Physically, the differences are even clearer. The rectangular shape of the Black Stone, for example, is uncharacteristic of *kudurrus*, which were either irregular pyramid- or cone-shaped or later, occasionally tablet-shaped.[108] Even the style of carving of the images on the top of the stone is quite different from the broad, rather curvilinear forms typical of *kudurru* carving; the slimmer, sharper images of the Black Stone are more reminiscent of the carving style seen in Neo-Assyrian palace or monument reliefs. The images are arranged, moreover, in two neat rows within a recessed square field carved into the top of the stone, in contrast to the freer arrangement typical of *kudurrus*, where figures often seem to float above the baseline of the field.[109]

Even more important than these stylistic differences, however, is the fact that the images on the Black Stone, except in three cases, are not taken from the traditional repertory of *kudurru* images at all, but are images of quite a different type. While the image of a horned crown on an altar is used as an emblem of the gods Anu or Enlil in the iconography of *kudurrus*, and the striding bull functions there as an emblem of the god Adad,[110] the other images carved on the top of the Black Stone do not appear in the *kudurru* repertory.[111] For that matter, these remaining images, which include the standing worshipper, the hill, the stylized Assyrian tree, the more realistic date palm, the seed plow, and the square with circled corners, are

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[108] Seidl, pp. 67-68.

[109] See for example Seidl's no. 80 (Abb. 14), which is inscribed like the Black Stone with images on its top, but shows these images either seated on the curved back of a snake or floating in a circle in the center of the field.

[110] Seidl, pp. 116-117 and 146.

[111] For the repertory of images used on *kudurrus* see Seidl, pp. 97-212. The square with circled corners may be related to the square mounted on an altar or pedestal that appears on two *kudurrus* in Seidl's listing, nos. 43 and 63, and that has been argued to be an emblem of the goddess Ninḫursaga (Seidl, p. 206). The square on the Black Stone, however, is not mounted on a pedestal, and its circled corners, perhaps representing the stars in a particular constellation, suggest that it may have a different significance than the squares on the two *kudurrus*.

not attested in either Assyrian or Babylonian iconography as emblems of gods.[112]

If the signs on Esarhaddon's Black Stone are different from the images carved on Babylonian *kudurrus* and are not even emblems of gods, what do these signs represent? Daniel David Luckenbill has pointed out that a nearly identical pattern of signs, this time arranged in a circle, was stamped into the flattened ends of two clay prisms inscribed with Babylon building inscriptions of Esarhaddon.[113] Luckenbill suggests that the images stamped on these cylinders should be associated with a somewhat enigmatic passage that appears in the text inscribed on one of those prisms, in which Esarhaddon reports that he has caused documents to be made of various materials (including clay) and that he has caused to be incised (or perhaps, "stamped") upon these documents "constellations, (which are) the image of the writing of my name."[114] This phrase about the writing of Esarhaddon's name in the stars, Luckenbill suggests, refers to the signs stamped on at least one of the clay prisms inscribed with this text. Since the Black Stone has almost identical signs (it substitutes the bull where the two stamped clay prisms show a lion), Luckenbill plausibly suggests that the signs on the Black Stone, as well, were a sort of rebus writing of Esarhaddon's name, and that the carved signs themselves represented constellations that were in turn thought to resemble particular cuneiform signs. Luckenbill's argument becomes less convincing when he tries to connect particular constellations to various cuneiform signs with which Esarhaddon's name can be written, but in principle his explanation seems plausible enough.[115] If his interpretation is correct, however, the signs on Esarhaddon's Black Stone, however reminiscent of the divine symbols on *kudurrus*, served a very different function, representing not gods, but Esarhaddon's own name. Late *kudurrus* sometimes included, in addition to the divine emblems, an image

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[112] The date palm tree is associated with the goddess Ishtar and also with her consort Tammuz, but is not, to my knowledge, used as an emblem representing either god.

[113] Daniel David Luckenbill, "The Black Stone of Esarhaddon," *AJSL* 41 (1925), pp. 165-173. For a drawing of these signs, see *CT* 44, pl. IV.

[114] Borger, *IAK*, Babylon A-G, Episode 40, pp. 27 ff. The passage does not appear in Babylon D, the text inscribed on the Black Stone, or in Babylon F, a fragmentary prism that is one of the two stamped with the circle of images. It is included in the text of the other stamped clay prism, however, Babylon A, as well as in the texts of Babylon C, AC, and E, none of whose exemplars is stamped. The word translated as "constellations" is *lumaššū*, a noun (here in the plural) that can refer to one of several stars whose heliacal setting or rising falls at or near solstices or equinoxes, can be more simply a poetic word for stars in general, or can refer to zodiacal constellations (See *CAD*, s.v. *lumaššu*. *AHw* proposes a definition limited to the latter meaning.). The precise meaning intended in this passage is, needless to say, obscure.

[115] See Borger's comment on Luckenbill's theory, in his notes to Ep. 40, p. 28.

of the ruler who had made the donation; Brinkman suggests this image of the king, which often overshadowed the religious symbols, was intended to add the strength of the king's royal presence to the guarantee extended by the gods, at a time when *kudurru* texts were beginning to take on many aspects of more strictly secular legal documents.[116] The writing of Esarhaddon's name in images on the Black Stone may have been intended as a bow to this Babylonian practice, but the Stone departs from the Babylonian practice in a most significant way by omitting the symbols of gods entirely. Although the text inscribed on the Black Stone still invokes divine protection for the grant, the Black Stone's visual imagery focuses instead on the role of the king (moreover, the Assyrian king) as the guarantor of Babylonian privileges and freedoms.

The Black Stone, although it recalls both Assyrian building inscription documents and Babylonian *kudurrus*, is neither. It is instead a compromise, a hybrid of traditional Assyrian and Babylonian forms, or more precisely, a traditional Babylonian form with certain unmistakably Assyrian elements imposed on it.[117] Both verbally and physically it encapsulates Esarhaddon's Babylonian policy in all its complexity, reflecting both that policy's benevolence and the price demanded for it. The text describes Esarhaddon's gracious concession to the citizens of Babylon in restoring their special privileges as citizens of that venerable city, but it also implies that there is a price to pay for this privilege; although the point is tactfully not emphasized, the grantor of the privileges is not a native Babylonian king but an Assyrian overlord, and they are granted with an unspoken understanding on both sides that such Babylonian freedoms will be conditional on Babylonia's cooperation with her Assyrian ruler. The restoration of privileges is the gracious concession of a conqueror, as both sides are well aware, and Babylonians will enjoy the privileges only as subjects of the Assyrian empire and its king, not as free and independent Babylonian citizens. The

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[116] Brinkman, p. 270

[117] It is not, however, an Assyrian *kudurru*, properly speaking. We know of at least three more conventional *kudurrus* recording grants by Assyrian kings: Seidl's nos. 108 and 109, recording privileges granted by Sargon II in his eleventh and ninth years, respectively; and a fragment of what appears to be a *kudurru*, complete with fragment of a serpent-like symbol, dating from the reign of Adad-nīrāri III, found at Nineveh, and published by J. E. Reade and C. B. F. Walker, "Some Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," *AfO* 28 (1981-82), pp. 117-118. There are also a few *kudurrus* of Assyrian princes who became kings of Babylonia: one of Aššur-nādin-šumi, published by J. A. Brinkman and Stephanie Dalley, "A Royal Kudurru from the Reign of Aššur-nādin-šumi," *ZA* 78/1 (1988), pp. 76-96, and one of Shamashshumukin, Seidl's no. 110. Whether these two latter kings should be considered as Assyrian or Babylonian in this case is a moot point. All of these *kudurrus*, however, in contrast to the Black Stone, are essentially undistinguishable from traditional Babylonian *kudurrus*.

grant of *kidinnūtu* status commemorated in the text was thus an expression of dominance as well as of benevolence.

This also was the message conveyed by the object itself. The Black Stone is in many ways almost a *kudurru*, but one with a distinctively Assyrian imprint imposed upon it. Its most striking physical characteristic is the name of the Assyrian king incised in signs on its top, replacing the traditional symbols of Babylonian gods.

Esarhaddon is here offering the Babylonians, in short, a choice of conquest or *kudurrus*, violent repression or benevolent rule, but the object itself makes it clear that if the Babylonians choose *kudurrus* and benevolent rule, the benefits they receive will be granted on Assyrian terms and with the clear understanding that the Babylonians are to be henceforth loyal and unrebellious subjects of Assyria. The Black Stone was in fact a tangible, physical emblem of the Babylonian policy of Esarhaddon's early years, a document whose text and physical form functioned together to make it an effective tool of Assyrian public policy.

Image as Error
The Representation of Assurbanipal as a Basket-Bearing King in Babylonia

My purpose in this essay is to consider the political impact of a set of four similar steles erected in Babylonia for the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (669-ca. 627 B.C.), the overlord of Babylonia in his capacity as ruler of the Assyrian empire, and for Assurbanipal's brother Shamashshumukin, who ruled Babylonia as king under him. Two of these steles were erected in the city of Babylon and depict Assurbanipal alone; the other two were erected in the nearby city of Borsippa and depict Assurbanipal in one case and Shamashshumukin in the other.[118] Three of the steles are relatively intact, and these are each inscribed with a text naming the king depicted on the stele and describing a temple building project he sponsored in that city; the surviving cuneiform signs on the fragmentary fourth stele suggest its inscription was identical to that on the better preserved Babylon stele.[119]

The four steles are quite unusual in that an image of the king covers the entire face of each, carved in such high relief that the figure resembles a statue carved in the round (Pl. 11). In addition, the king is shown in frontal view rather than in profile, a surprising departure from the conventions of Assyrian and Babylonian relief carving, and he is depicted in the act of carrying a workman's basket on his head, an image unique in Assyrian and Babylonian royal iconography in this period. These unusual visual aspects of the steles, as we will see, gave them a strong resemblance to certain ancient figurines (Pl. 12) that depicted early rulers of Mesopotamia performing a ritual that was part of groundbreaking ceremonies for temples, a ritual in which the ruler carried on his own head a type of basket common laborers used for earth-moving, an action symbolizing the ruler's fulfillment of

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[118] The intact stele of Assurbanipal from Babylon and the steles of Assurbanipal and his brother from Borsippa are pictured and their visual elements discussed in J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, Baghdader Forschungen 4 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1982), I, p. 215, and II, figs. 224, 225, and 226. For the text on the intact Babylon stele, see Grant Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157-612 BC)*, Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Periods, II (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1995), Assurbanipal text 2, pp. 199-202, and for the texts on the Borsippa steles, Assurbanipal text 14, pp. 217-19 and Shamashshumukin text 3, pp. 252-53. That the purpose of the texts is partly to identify the figure depicted on the stele is suggested by their opening words, "I, Assurbanipal" and "I, Shamashshumukin."

[119] BM 22533, published in J. E. Reade and C. B. F. Walker, "Some Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," *AfO* 28 (1981/82), p. 119, no. 4 and fig. 8. The surviving text duplicates parts of lines 18-22 of the better-preserved stele, as Walker notes.

his duty to build and restore the temples of the state's gods, a fundamental aspect of Mesopotamian royal ideology. The royal images on these four Assyrian steles are visual quotations from the early basket-bearing figurines, representations of Assurbanipal and Shamashshumukin as performers of the ancient ritual.

For more than fifty years, anthropologists, political scientists, and communications theorists have been engaged in analyzing the role public rituals play in political life,[120] sharing a broad consensus that public rites, whether secular or religious, are frequently expressions of political relations[121] and as symbolic enactments of those relationships, often have a significant impact on political attitudes and behavior.[122] The use of public rituals as political tools, either to support the political status quo or to encourage changes in it, has become the subject of a massive and still growing bibliography in these scholarly fields, which have examined the political impact of public rituals in settings as various as France under Louis XIV, tribal Africa in the colonial period, Nazi Germany before World War II, and modern-day America.[123]

Ancient historians have made some significant contributions to this discussion. H. S. Versnel's analysis of the Roman triumph and S. R. F. Price's study of the cult of the emperor in Roman Asia Minor, for example, have drawn the attention of classical scholars to the use of public rituals in the

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[120] By the term "ritual" I mean a relatively fixed set of actions consisting of elements (such as words, images, music, and gestures) that point beyond themselves to what is thought of as a greater reality or concept, that are performed at fixed intervals or on certain occasions, and that may be religious in implication but are not necessarily so. By referring to these Assyrian rituals as "public," I mean to focus on rituals performed before groups of people capable of having some impact on the political life of their state or community, in the case of Assyria and Babylonia primarily members of the political, economic, or religious elite, and to a much more limited extent, ordinary Assyrian citizens or members of the public at large. For general discussions of the closely related categories of ritual and ceremony, including some comment on their political ramifications, see Evan M. Zuesse, "Ritual," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. 12, pp. 405-422 and Bobby C. Alexander, "Ceremony," ibid., vol. 3, pp. 179-83.

[121] See, for example, the comment of Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 170: "Closely involved with the objectification of the way things really are, ritualization is a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations."

[122] See, for example, the comments of S.R.F. Price on the situation of the Roman emperor Augustus: "In its pure form charismatic authority is naturally unstable. It may not last the lifetime of its possessor and it certainly cannot be transmitted to his successor. The importance of rituals is that they can objectify and institutionalize this unstable form of charisma. Thus the sudden outburst of cults of Augustus helped to ensure the perpetuation of his personal authority" (*Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* [Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984], p. 58).

[123] For a cogent introduction to this literature, with bibliography, see David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1988).

Roman empire as a means of creating positive public attitudes toward a ruler or as a tool for encouraging acceptance of new political structures.[124] In recent years, Assyriologists also have played an increasingly active role in the exploration of the political impact of public ritual. Amélie Kuhrt, for example, has examined the political effect of Babylonian New Year's festival rites in which the ruler of Babylonia traditionally played a conspicuous role; she concludes that the New Year's rituals were adopted in turn by Babylonian usurpers, Assyrian conquerors, Babylonians who later regained control of Babylonia, and finally the Persian rulers who ultimately seized control from them, because these rituals "most clearly expressed" continuity with the past, the legitimacy of new kings, and the support of the gods for their rule, while demonstrating each new king's contributions to the maintenance of order and prosperity, making New Year's rituals a powerfully effective mechanism for encouraging acceptance of new regimes.[125] In recent years other Assyriologists have explored sacred marriage rites, New Year's festival rites once again, building ceremonies, and Assyrian ritual lion hunts, in each case concluding that the public performance of the rite in question helped confer an aura of legitimacy on the Mesopotamian ruler who celebrated it.[126]

Most studies of the effect of rituals on political life, ancient and modern, have emphasized the benefits public leaders have derived from publicly performing the rituals in question. As a mild corrective to this enthusiastic endorsement of public ritual as a political tool, I will explore instead the political dangers inherent in public rituals, particularly their potential to

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[124] H.S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970); Price, *Rituals and Power.*

[125] A. Kuhrt, "Usurpation, Conquest and Ceremonial: From Babylon to Persia," in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies,* David Cannadine and S.R.F. Price, ed. (Cambridge/London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 20-55, esp. 46.

[126] Jerrold S. Cooper, "Sacred Marriage and Popular Cult in Early Mesopotamia," *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East,* Eiko Matsushima, ed. (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1993), pp. 81-96; Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Ina šulmi īrub: *Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der* Akītu-*Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im I. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Baghdader Forschungen 16 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1994); Philippe Talon, "Le Rituel comme moyen de légitimation politique au 1er millénaire en Mésopotamie," *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East,* J. Quaegebeur, ed., Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 55 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), pp. 421-433; Elnathan Weissert, "Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurbanipal (82-5-22,2)," *Assyria 1995 (Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7-11, 1995),* Simo Parpola and R. M. Whiting, ed. (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 339-58. The classic study by René Labat, *Le Caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1939) discusses the king's role in ritual but says little about its political impact.

convey to their audience a message somewhat different from the one their performer had intended, so that the public performance of the ritual unwittingly undermines the very political position it was meant to bolster. To illustrate this point, I propose to examine the decision of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal to commission and then display in Babylonia several steles representing him (and in one case his brother, as well) in the act of performing the ancient Babylonian basket-bearing ritual. Although Assurbanipal, in publicly assuming the image of a basket-bearing Babylonian ruler, surely intended to encourage Babylonians to think of him as a legitimate embodiment of their own traditions of rule, the Babylonians' reaction to the steles, as we will see, may have been far less positive than Assurbanipal intended and may even have encouraged the Babylonians' later revolt against him.

To gauge the Babylonians' probable reaction to the steles representing Assurbanipal as a basket-bearing ruler, it is necessary to know something of the early history of the ritual as it was performed in the Mesopotamian south, the region later known as Babylonia. In southern Mesopotamia, the basket-bearing ritual was one of great antiquity. The earliest evidence suggesting it was being performed is a plaque that shows the Sumerian king Ur-Nanshe, ruler of the city-state of Lagash about 2500 B.C., carrying a basket on his head, accompanied by an inscription that describes him as a builder king.[127] The slightly later temple-building inscriptions of Gudea, who ruled Lagash about 2130 B.C., describe that ruler's basket bearing in some detail and make it clear that by Gudea's time, the carrying of a laborer's basket to initiate temple building was understood as an act of religious piety that represented the ruler as temple builder and pious and humble servant of the gods, supporting his claims to be a proper and legitimate ruler capable of winning the gods' essential acceptance and support for himself and his state. The inscription opens with an account of Gudea's entry into the temple carrying what is referred to as "the holy basket" and accompanied by gods. It refers again to bearing the basket as the prelude to Gudea's molding of the symbolic first brick to symbolically begin construction of the building, and finally, in the summary that concludes

[127] On Mesopotamian groundbreaking rituals, see Richard Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968), with discussion of Ur-Nanshe's plaque on pp. 20-21, and Sylvie Lackenbacher, *Le Roi bâtisseur: Les Récits de construction assyriens des origines à Teglatphalasar III* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1982), pp. 129-31. On the early evidence for basket bearing in the Mesopotamian south, with bibliography, see Barbara N. Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1993), pp. 82-94. For a photograph of Ur-Nanshe's plaque, see Horst Klengel, ed., *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), fig. 37, p. 82.

Gudea's account of the rituals, it refers to his basket bearing once again, this time using it as an emblem of Gudea's entire activity as builder of the temple: "Gudea, the builder of the temple, in the temple put the basket on his head like a holy crown; he laid the foundation, erecting the walls on the ground."[128] The basket has become "a holy crown," borne on Gudea's head as the mark of his holy and legitimate rule.

Gudea also commemorated his basket bearing with a series of small bronze figurines that represented him in frontal view with arms raised to support a basket balanced on his head. During the next 350 years, such figurines (e.g., Pl. 12), often inscribed with the name of the ruler they represented and a brief account of his temple building, became a standard part of southern Mesopotamian temple foundation deposits, implying the continued performance of the ritual by rulers as part of temple foundation rites until at least the end of the Isin-Larsa period.[129] Fragments of similar figurines found in the city of Assur in Assyria suggest the ritual was performed in Assyria as well.[130] By the thirteenth century B.C. at the latest, however, figurines representing rulers as basket bearers were no longer deposited in temple foundations, suggesting that the ceremony had gradually fallen into disuse. Since southern Mesopotamian temples were made of clay brick and required repair in almost every generation, however, temple foundation boxes containing the figurines continued to be opened at regular intervals. The figurines in them were reverently anointed and reburied for future kings to see, preserving over the centuries some memory of the ritual and its association with ancient builder kings.

In 681 B.C., some six centuries after deposit of the figurines had ended, King Esarhaddon of Assyria, Assurbanipal's father and predecessor, revived the performance of the ancient ritual in Babylon as one of the earliest official acts of his reign. At the beginning of his reign, Esarhaddon's position in Babylonia was precarious. After generations of alternating Babylonian revolts and Assyrian repression of them, Esarhaddon's father King Sennacherib had seized and sacked Babylon, the capital city, had severely damaged its temple Esagila, the state's most important religious institution, and had deported thousands of Babylonians, along with the statue of Marduk, Babylonia's patron god. This rigorous treatment had produced only a brief period of quiet followed by the assassination of Sennacherib and an-

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[128] The translation is by Richard Ellis, in collaboration with Miguel Civil: Ellis, *Foundation Deposits,* Appendix A, pp. 170-72.

[129] The latest canephoric figurines found in foundation deposits are those of Rim-Sin I, ruler of the city-state of Larsa between 1822 and 1763 B.C.

[130] Evelyn Klengel-Brandt and Dessa Rittig, "Korbträgerfiguren aus Assur," *Forschungen und Berichte* 22 (1982), pp. 7-114.

other Babylonian revolt. Having subdued the revolt, Esarhaddon then reversed his father's punitive Babylonian policy and began efforts to win at least grudging acceptance from Babylonia. It was at this point that he revived the ancient basket-bearing ritual, personally appearing in the city of Babylon to perform it during groundbreaking ceremonies for the Esagila temple, which was to be rebuilt under his patronage. Esarhaddon's Babylon inscriptions characterize his basket bearing as an act of religious leadership demonstrating to the Babylonians the proper respect for their own patron deity: "In order to show the people his (i.e., Marduk's) great godhead and cause (them) to fear his lordship, I lifted the basket upon my head and caused myself to bear it."[131] Standing before the assembled priests and officials of Babylonia within the precincts of Babylonia's most important temple and raising the basket to his head in the ancient gesture, Esarhaddon placed himself symbolically in the line of the ancient builder kings of southern Mesopotamia, whose traditional responsibilities for temple care and religious leadership he now publicly assumed.

Esarhaddon's bearing of the basket appears to have been a political success, helping him to persuade the Babylonians to accept him as a legitimate king. Esarhaddon's benevolent Babylonian policy, inaugurated by his performance of the ritual in Esagila, proved remarkably successful. During his entire eleven years of reign there were no further revolts, and the long recalcitrant Babylonians by and large cooperated with Esarhaddon's resident Assyrian officials.[132]

At Esarhaddon's death in 669 B.C., his son Assurbanipal followed him as king of Assyria and ruler of the Assyrian empire, immediately initiating efforts to complete the still unfinished reconstruction of Esagila. To mark his own assumption of the role of builder king in Babylon, Assurbanipal commissioned two marble steles which, as we have seen, depicted him in frontal view bearing a basket on his head in precisely the same gesture as that of the early southern Mesopotamian rulers depicted by the ancient figurines (Pls. 11 and 12), an image almost certainly intended to suggest to the Babylonian elite that he was both his father's successor in Babylon and a legitimate ruler in terms of ancient Babylonian royal traditions.[133] Although one of these steles, as we have noted, survives only as a fragment

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[131] Borger, *IAK*, p. 20, Babylon A, C, and E, Episode 21; the version Borger labels "Babylon D" omits this passage.

[132] For a detailed assessment of Esarhaddon's reign in Babylonia, see Porter, *Images, Power and Politics*.

[133] The resemblance of Assurbanipal's stele to the ancient figurines is strikingly clear in Ellis, *Foundation Deposits*, where drawings of basket-bearing figurines of the rulers Gudea, Ur-Ningirsu, Ur-Nammu, Shulgi, and Rim-Sin (figs. 19-20 and 22-25) are immediately followed by a photograph of Assurbanipal's Babylon stele (fig. 26).

showing part of the Assyrian king's characteristic fringed garment and a few broken lines of text, the second stele is intact; on its face, in large signs running across the body of the king and framing him on either side, it bears an inscription that recalls the texts on the ancient figurines. It names and praises Assurbanipal, listing his pious actions, and then commemorates his construction of the Ekarzagina chapel in Esagila. Neither this inscription nor any other states that Assurbanipal actually performed the basket-bearing ritual as part of his temple building activities, but he may well have done so, since public performance of the ritual would certainly have strengthened the impact of his appearance as a basket-bearing king on the two steles.

The two steles depicting Assurbanipal were probably erected in the E-sagila temple itself. The better-preserved stele was actually found in the temple area during excavations in 1895; the fragmentary second stele was purchased in 1894 and has no excavated provenance, but was said to come from Babylon.[134] The discovery of the first in the temple area, and the fact that it carries an Esagila building inscription which appears to be repeated on the fragmentary second stele, make it likely that both steles were erected in the temple. The unusually deep modeling of the figure of the king carved on the face of each stele suggests the monuments may have been intended to serve as royal statues, like statues carved in the round, which they resemble; such a function is also implied by the text, which refers to the stele on which it is inscribed as a royal image (*ṣalam šarrūtiya*) rather than as an inscribed monument. As Irene Winter has noted, statues of standing kings were often placed in temples standing before the statue of the temple's god to speak to the god on behalf of the king and his people.[135] Although steles bearing images of the king do not appear to have normally been used in this way, the resemblance of these two steles to royal statues and the discovery of one somewhere in the temple precincts suggests the basket-bearing images of Assurbanipal may have been erected in the Ekarzagina chapel

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[134] The discovery of the intact Assurbanipal stele in the area of the Marduk temple at Babylon on August 30, 1895, by Daud Thoma, chief foreman of Hormuzd Rassam, is reported in Rassam's unpublished correspondence, now in the British Museum archives: J. E. Reade in *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Vol. VI: Tablets from Sippar I*, Erle Leichty, ed. (London: British Museum, 1986), p. xxi. For the reported provenance of the stele fragment, see Reade and Walker, *AfO* 28 (1981/82), p. 119.

[135] Irene J. Winter, "'Idols of the King': Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Art in Ritual Context*, K. Ashley and I. J. Winter, ed., *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (1992), pp. 12-42. Winter's argument is based primarily on earlier evidence from Sumer and later evidence from Babylonia, but an inscription of Esarhaddon suggests royal statues in temples had a similar function in the Neo-Assyrian period (Borger, *IAK*, p. 87, AsBbE, reverse, line 3).

whose construction the texts commemorate, to stand before the god Ea in constant prayer and as a perpetual reminder of Assurbanipal's benefits to the Babylon temple and its gods. In such a prominent location, the two steles would also have provided a daily reminder to the politically powerful priests of Esagila that Assurbanipal had now assumed the traditional role of builder king and patron of the chief temple of Babylonia, an action that would normally have established him as Babylonia's sole legitimate ruler.

This had certainly been his father's intention in performing the ritual, and it had been to all appearances successful. But there had been, since Esarhaddon's performance of the ritual at the beginning of his reign, an important change in the political situation in Babylonia. Late in his reign, for reasons that remain unclear, Esarhaddon had chosen to divide the future rule of Assyria and Babylonia, which he had united in his own person. While he had named Assurbanipal to follow him as king of Assyria, he had named a second son, Shamashshumukin, to follow him as king in Babylonia. Assurbanipal, following his father's wishes, formally appointed Shamashshumukin as king of Babylon in the year following his own accession and even permitted him to "take the hands of Marduk " during the procession in which Marduk (represented by his statue) was returned from Assyria to his temple in Babylon, an action traditionally performed by the king of Babylon when Marduk's statue was led in procession during the Babylonian New Year's festival.[136] When Assurbanipal erected the steles in Babylon that represented him as a basket-bearing king, in other words, Shamashshumukin was already officially the king of Babylon, publicly acknowledged as such in both title and figurative honors. Assurbanipal's public assumption of the image of basket bearer in the Babylonian capital under these circumstances created a situation in which there were, in effect, two kings of Babylon in terms of Babylonia's own royal traditions, a dangerously ambiguous position that might well encourage the Babylonians to ponder which of the two Assyrians should be the focus of their primary allegiance.

Assurbanipal was surely well aware of the ambiguities in his position, and the Babylon steles suggest that Assurbanipal intended his adoption of the image of basket bearer to help resolve those ambiguities by serving as an emblem of the legitimate dominance of the Assyrian emperor over Babylonia's king. On the one hand, the steles draw attention to Assurbanipal's Assyrian identity by showing him in Assyrian royal dress and in the characteristic hat of the Assyrian king, which is emphasized by showing the basket balanced rather improbably behind it. These Assyrian royal accou-

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[136] On these events, see Grant Frame, *Babylonia 689-627 B.C.: A Political History* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1992), pp. 102-06.

trements underlined Assurbanipal's position as the successor to his father Esarhaddon, a king who had not incidentally also performed the ritual in Babylon and who had been largely accepted as ruler of Babylonia while simultaneously acting as king of Assyria. Showing the basket-bearing Assurbanipal in Assyrian dress further implied that responsibility for the care of Marduk's temple Esagila, previously an important duty of the king of Babylon, was now assumed instead by the Assyrian emperor in his role as Babylonia's overlord. The text on the stele echoes these ideas, projecting a verbal image of Assurbanipal as emperor and as Babylonia's primary lord. It assigns to Assurbanipal traditional imperial titles shared by both states ("king of the world" and "king of the four quarters"), it describes him as the sole royal patron of Esagila and of other Babylonian temples, and it refers to Shamashshumukin only briefly as Assurbanipal's appointee, named king of Babylon to ensure that the strong might not oppress the weak.[137] The Babylonian king's duties, in other words, are characterized in the text as consisting primarily of keeping order, while the Assyrian emperor is described at some length as fulfilling important religious duties traditionally fundamental to Babylonian kingship. The implication is that Assurbanipal, as Assyrian emperor, was to be understood as the true successor in Babylon to Esarhaddon and to Babylonia's ancient builder kings. Perhaps already uncertain of Shamashshumukin's loyalty, Assurbanipal appears to have been using the image of himself as a traditional basket-bearing king to focus the Babylonians' allegiance primarily on himself rather than on the brother who ruled for Assyria in Babylonia.

This move, however, was inherently risky, since the ritual in ancient times had been performed by the sole legitimate ruler of the state in question; it thus recalled Babylonia's long tradition of rule by one man at a time. Although Assurbanipal certainly intended the image of himself as a basket-bearing king to help convince the Babylonians of the legitimacy of his imperial rule over Babylonia, it was all too likely that Babylonians would perceive it instead as a competitive image, implying the need to choose between their two rulers to restore the traditional arrangement. If the Babylonians were to make such a choice, however, it was not at all clear that they would choose the Assyrian emperor over their resident Assyrian king.

My remarks so far have been based on the premise that Assurbanipal alone was depicted as a basket-bearing king in Babylon, but it is of course possible that the absence of a stele depicting Shamashshumukin as basket bearer in Babylon is simply an accident of preservation and that both rulers

[137] The phrase is a quotation from the introduction to Hammurabi's Law Code (i 39 and xl 60) and was echoed in an inscription of Sargon II, so it was not a derogatory phrase, but in this context, it was a limiting one (for references, see *CAD* s. v. *ḫabālu,* A1).

were represented as basket-bearing kings on steles erected in Esagila. If that was the case, the paired steles, representing both rulers, were presumably intended to present the Babylonians with an image of harmonious royal partnership. Even if this were the case, however, there was considerable risk that the steles would instead draw attention to the ambiguities in the two rulers' position. The image of two kings side by side performing a ritual that marked each as the legitimate king of Babylon almost inevitably raised the possibility of choosing between them.

But whether or not a stele of Shamashshumukin was erected in Babylon, one was certainly erected in the city of Borsippa, where a stele representing Assurbanipal as basket bearer and a second stele showing Shamashshumukin in the identical pose were discovered together in a room near the cella of the temple Ezida, dedicated to Nabû, Borsippa's patron deity (Pls. 13 and 14). This room, located at the rear of a suite of rooms containing the temple's cella, or inner sanctum, was evidently a storage room in the final years of the temple's life; in addition to the two steles, it appears to have contained a collection of texts dating from well after Assurbanipal's reign. It seems likely that the steles were originally erected elsewhere in the temple, quite probably in the nearby cella itself, and in later days were removed to the storeroom in which they were discovered.[138] As at Babylon, the texts accompanying the basket-bearing images on these steles make no mention of a performance of the ritual, which is suggested only by the visual imagery. The inscriptions, this time placed on the back of the steles, list the titles, qualities, and achievements of whichever king is pictured on the front and conclude by announcing that he has now sponsored construction of a new enclosure wall for the Ezida temple; no reference is made to any involvement of the other ruler in the project. As in the case of the Babylon steles, the high modeling of the figure depicted on the front of the stele suggests these steles may have been intended to double as royal statues, standing side by side in front of Nabû to continually request his protection of king and country. The effect of the two steles would have been a rather startling double image of kingship, visually underlining the presence of two kings in Babylonia, who appear in these Borsippa steles in the same ancient pose, as if to imply their equal legitimacy in terms of Babylonian tradition.

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138 Julian E. Reade, " Rassam's Excavations at Borsippa and Kutha, 1879-82," *Iraq* 48 (1986), pp. 109 and 113, with plans of the temple in fig. 1 and in pl. XIII, on which the place where the statues were found is marked, behind the room labeled C2 on later plans. The records of the excavation of the temple are lamentably vague, but Reade speculates that part of a cylinder "found at the same time, possibly in the same room" (p. 109) might be the remainder of a Neo-Babylonian copy of an earlier foundation document, found by Rassam in the room later labeled C1 by Koldewey. Tablets found with it in C1, perhaps also originally in the inner room, Reade tentatively identifies as part of a group of mid-fifth-century copies of earlier documents (pp. 106-09).

The text on Shamashshumukin's stele refers briefly but politely to Assurbanipal as the Assyrian king and emperor, an indication that Shamashshumukin's stele was not erected at the time of his revolt to replace that of Assurbanipal; it must date instead to the earlier period when the two kings both ruled Babylonia. Although it is not clear which king actually commissioned the Borsippa steles, the decision to erect paired steles in Borsippa showing both kings as basket bearers was surely approved by Assurbanipal even if it was Shamashshumukin who ordered them built; carefully monitored by Assyrian officials stationed in Babylonia and exercising limited independent power, Shamashshumukin could not have erected a monument in an important Babylonian temple without his brother's permission.[139]

Why had Assurbanipal decided to have both himself and Shamashshumukin publicly represented as basket bearers in Borsippa? One factor in the decision was probably the relative unimportance of Borsippa in comparison to Babylon, where the steles showing Assurbanipal as basket bearer had probably already been erected; Assurbanipal may have permitted the display of an image of Shamashshumukin as basket-bearing king to appear alongside a similar image of himself in Borsippa to encourage the Babylonians' support for his viceroy Shamashshumukin, while also subtly implying Shamashshumukin's lesser status by showing him as the patron only of a temple less important than Esagila of Babylon and by associating him primarily with the god Nabû, who according to Assyrian and Babylonian theology was Marduk's son and subordinate.[140]

Timing probably also played a role in Assurbanipal's decision. Although it is not possible to assign firm dates to any of Assurbanipal's Babylonian building projects, the reconstruction of the chapel in Esagila that is commemorated on the better preserved Babylon stele of Assurbanipal probably occurred at the beginning of his reign, since the chapel was the site of the rituals that accompanied the return of Marduk's statue to Esagila early in Assurbanipal's first full year. The less urgent work on Nabû's temple in Borsippa, commemorated on the two steles erected in that city, probably took place later. This raises the possibility that the paired Borsippa steles were a response to political changes that occurred in Babylonia as the reign progressed. The support in Babylonia for Shamashshumukin that led to an uprising against Assurbanipal in his seventeenth year of reign must have

139 The degree of authority exercised by Shamashshumukin in Babylonia is discussed by Frame, *Babylonia*, pp. 107-14.

140 See Barbara N. Porter, "What the Assyrians Thought the Babylonians Thought about the Relative Status of Nabû and Marduk in the Late Assyrian Period," *Assyria 1995 (Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7-11, 1995)*, Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting, ed. (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 253-260.

been growing steadily as time passed, although texts from Babylonia are understandably rather quiet on this point. Surely made aware of Shamash-shumukin's growing popularity by his informants in Babylonia, Assurbanipal may now have felt it expedient to present himself in Babylonia as Shamashshumukin's partner.

As in the case of Babylon, if images of both kings were in fact erected there, the image of two basket-bearing kings working side by side presented by the pair of steles erected in Borsippa was probably intended to be read as an image of cooperation, a traditional image of Babylonian kingship now reused on paired steles to suggest the legitimacy of cooperative rule by Babylon's king and Assyria's emperor. On the Borsippa steles the kings appear essentially as equals; their visual images are identical except for Assurbanipal's royal dress and Shamashshumukin's plainer clothing, and each king is described in the text on his own stele as the sole patron of building in Ezida. Despite Assurbanipal's probable intention to project an image of royal partnership, however, by publicly presenting himself and his brother in identical poses, each performing the same royal ritual, Assurbanipal inadvertently gave graphic expression to their increasingly competitive position, presenting an image of two kings with identical claims to legitimacy in the same sphere. That the Borsippa steles were in fact understood as competing royal images is suggested by the later mutilation of the stele representing Shamashshumukin, probably after his revolt had been crushed; parts of Shamashshumukin's face and Babylonian royal hat, his identifying marks, have been chiseled away, as if to erase a royal image that had come to rival Assurbanipal's.

We will never know the precise impact the publicly displayed images of Assurbanipal as a basket-bearing king had on Babylonian politics. It seems clear, however, that Assurbanipal's decision to have himself represented in this way in Babylon and Borsippa while Shamashshumukin was already king of Babylonia in title and to some extent in practice, was a political miscalculation that risked encouraging the Babylonians to consider choosing between their two rulers, whom the steles suggested to be equally legitimate in terms of Babylonian royal and religious ideology. The constant visual presence of the steles, reminding Babylonians of Assurbanipal's assumption of religious duties that were traditionally the prerogative of a single king of Babylonia, was a political error that may well have worked to weaken Assurbanipal's already precarious hold on Babylonia.

Assyrian Propaganda for the West
Esarhaddon's Steles for Til Barsip and Sam'al

Soon after his successful campaign to Egypt in the year 671 B.C., King Esarhaddon of Assyria (681-669 B.C.) commissioned three large stone steles, [141] each with a carving on its face showing the king raising an emblem of royal power in one hand while two small captives (the rebellious king Abdi-Milkutti of Sidon, captured in 677, and the crown prince of Egypt, captured in the recent Egyptian campaign) stand or kneel at his feet (Pls. 15, 17, and 28). On the sides of each stele are images of the two sons Esarhaddon had recently appointed as his heirs to the thrones of Assyria and Babylonia (Pls. 16, 18 and 29).[142]

The three steles were erected in two northwestern provincial capitals of the Assyrian empire, two of them in Til Barsip, a long-established provincial capital on the upper Euphrates, and the third in Sam'al, a western vassal city that had become a provincial capital under direct Assyrian rule not long before Esarhaddon's reign.

In both cities the steles were erected on high stone pedestals and prominently displayed. The stele at Sam'al was erected in the gate leading to the citadel, a traditional setting for public monuments in western cities.[143] At

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[141] I am indebted to many institutions and individuals for supporting my research on this project: The American Philosophical Society; the Harvard Semitic Museum; Dr. Evelyn Klengel-Brandt and the Vorderasiatisches Museum of Berlin; Prof. Dr. Sultan Mehesen, Director General of Antiquities and Museums, Syrian Arab Republic; Mr. Wahid Khayata and the National Museum of Aleppo; Mr. Anwar Abdel Ghafour, photographer for the Aleppo Museum; Dr. Michael Porter and the Cartographic Division of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute: and above all, Profs. Guy Bunnens and Arlette Roobaert and the members of the Tell Ahmar team, for their generous hospitality and patient help. I am grateful to them all. For helpful comments on the paper itself I am indebted to Irene J. Winter, Michael H. Porter, and Nadav Na'aman.

[142] The nature of the object raised by the king is unclear, but it was an attribute of royalty, first in Babylonia, and later in Assyria. See for discussion, J. E. Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in M. T. Larsen, ed., *Power and Propaganda* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), p. 341, and for illustrations, A. Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (New York: Golden Press, 1961), figs. 73, 133, 216, and 217. For the identity of the captives, see F. Thureau-Dangin, "Tell Ahmar," *Syria* 10 (1929), pp. 191-92 and F. Thureau-Dangin and M. Dunand, *Til-Barsib* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1936), pp. 151-52; for the figures on the side panels, see in addition J. E. Reade, "Neo-Assyrian Court and Army: Evidence of the Sculptures," *Iraq* 34 (1972), p. 93 and *idem*, s.v. "Kronprinz," *RlA* 6, pp. 249-50.

[143] D. Ussishkin, "The Erection of Royal Monuments in City-Gates," *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honor of Tahsin Özgüc*, K. Emre, B. Hrouda, M. Mellink, ed. (Ankara: Türk Turih Kurumu Basimevi, 1989), pp. 485-92.

Til Barsip one stele was erected just inside the eastern city gate, while the second stele was erected at the foot of the citadel, approaching the Assyrian palace.[144]

In publishing the Til Barsip steles in 1929, F. Thureau-Dangin, the first excavator of Til Barsip, commented that the carvings on these steles represent the same scene as the stele at Sam'al; the carvings are so similar, in his

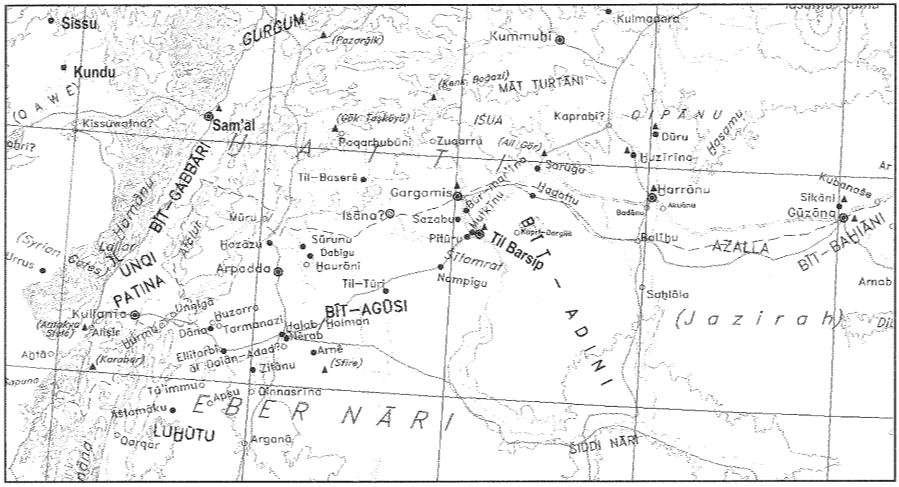

Figure 3 The Northwest Corner of the Assyrian Empire, ca. 670 B.C.

opinion, that he treated them essentially as duplicates, using evidence from the Sam'al stele to confirm the identity of figures on the two steles at Til Barsip.[145] Discussions of the steles since that time have followed Thureau-Dangin's lead in stressing the great similarity of the three monuments.[146]

Although the three steles do represent essentially the same scene, it is clear on closer examination that the elements of that scene are handled differently in the two cities, significantly changing the effect of the visual imagery. In addition, the texts inscribed on the steles in the two cities are

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144 For the locations of the Til Barsip steles, see Thureau-Dangin, *Syria* 10 (1929), pp. 189-90 and Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib*, pp. 151 and 155. For the Sam'al stele, see F. von Lushan, *Ausgrabungen von Sendschirli*, I (Berlin: Spemann, 1893), p. 10, fig. 2. A second Neo-Assyrian stele found at Sam'al, badly burned, is mentioned by Borger, *IAK*, p. 100, in connection with this stele, but it is unlikely to be related to the Esarhaddon stele; no text survives, and enough survives of the bas-relief on its face to show it represented only a single figure (see Luschan, fig. 9).

145 Thureau-Dangin, *Syria* 10 (1929), pp. 185-205 and *Til-Barsib*, pp. 151-56.

146 See for example, J.E. Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda," p. 342; J. M. Russell, s.v. "Til Barsip," Grove *Dictionary of Art*, J. Turner, ed. (New York: Grove, 1996), pp. 873-74; and J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1982), I, pp. 212-213 and II, figs. 217-219 (who notes differences of style and visual detail between the steles but treats the scenes as essentially duplicates of one another).

completely different, one consisting of brief accounts of a series of royal achievements, the other of a detailed report on the campaign to Egypt. The steles erected at Sam'al and Til Barsip are in fact different both visually and verbally in ways that made them deliver different messages to two cities whose political situations, as we will see, were quite different.

The pattern of differences in the steles suggests they were designed as vehicles of Assyrian propaganda. The word *propaganda* has acquired a wide range of meanings in modern usage; in Assyriological discussions, it has usually been used in its more restricted and pejorative sense, to denote systematic efforts by the Assyrians to manipulate political attitudes and behavior through symbolic public actions or images that were in many cases deliberately intimidating or that involved the deliberate suppression or distortion of information. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, however, offers a more neutral definition of *propaganda*, as "any organized or concerted group, effort, or movement to spread particular doctrines, information, etc.,"[147] while scholarly discussions in fields such as political science and communications theory[148] have also tended to adopt more neutral definitions that encourage an exploration of the similarities and differences between propaganda and other forms of persuasive public rhetoric and action. It is in this more neutral sense that I am using the word here. By proposing that Esarhaddon's three steles should be included in the discussion of Assyrian propaganda, I mean to suggest that the visual and verbal imagery of the steles was designed less to inform than to persuade, and that the steles appear to have been designed at least in part to influence

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147 2nd ed. (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1956), p. 676.

148 For a recent discussion of Assyrian propaganda in general and of the use of the word in Assyriological discussions in particular, see the perceptive comments of H. Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," *Assyria 1995,* S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, ed. (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 325-38, especially pp. 332-35. (See also note 149 below.) On the use of the term propaganda in the social sciences, see Bruce L. Smith, s.v. "Propaganda," *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* D. L. Sills, ed. (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1958), v. 12, pp. 579-89, who defines propaganda as "the relatively deliberate manipulation, by means of symbols (words, gestures, flags, images, monuments, music, etc.), of other people's thought or actions with respect to beliefs, values, and behaviors which these people ('reactors') regard as controversial" (p. 579). He argues that the elements of deliberateness and manipulativeness distinguish propaganda from both casual communication and the "free" exchange of ideas, while the effort to offer a spectrum of ideas, rather than a single prefabricated argument, distinguishes education from the promulgation of propaganda. He comments in passing that although the term propaganda was coined in 1622 A.D. as part of the title of the College of Propaganda, founded to supervise missionary activity of the Roman Catholic Church, the phenomenon itself began in the west with the Greeks ca. 500 B.C. with the codification of rhetoric; I mean to suggest here that the use of propaganda as Smith defines it dates at least to the time of the Assyrians.

the political attitudes and behavior of audiences in the cities where the steles were erected.

The discussion of Assyrian propaganda has so far focused primarily on the images and texts that were presented to audiences in the palaces and cities of the Assyrian homeland, and the picture of Assyrian propaganda that has emerged from these discussions is of an essentially monolithic phenomenon, the systematic projection in any given period of a single, undifferentiated image of Assyrian power and dominance to the Assyrian king, his gods, his magnates, and his subjects in the empire at large, as well as to vassals and foreign diplomats during their visits to the imperial centers in Assyria.[149] The example of Esarhaddon's steles at Til Barsip and Sam'al suggests, however, that Assyrian propaganda could instead be flexible and nuanced, projecting carefully differentiated messages to different audiences, even within a single region.

To test the hypothesis that the differences in the steles were designed to address the different political and cultural circumstances of audiences in the two cities, we need to look in more detail first at the circumstances of the two cities and then at the steles themselves. Although the cultural and political situation of the cities in Esarhaddon's reign must be reconstructed from documentary evidence that is sparse and archaeological evidence that is to some extent ambiguous, the sources make it clear that the different experience of the two cities under Assyrian domination had made them by Esarhaddon's day quite different both culturally and politically.

Before its capture by Assyria, Til Barsip was a sizeable fortified north Syrian city and a center of the resistance to Assyrian conquest led by the

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[149] In addition to Tadmor's discussion (n. 148 above), see A. L. Oppenheim, "Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires," in *Propaganda and Communication in World History, I: The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times*, H. D. Laswell et al., ed. (Honolulu: U. Press of Hawaii, 1980), pp. 111-44; P. Garelli, "La Propagande royale assyrienne," *Akkadica* 27 (1982), pp. 16-29; M. Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in Larsen, *Power and Propaganda*, pp. 297-318; *idem*, "2084: Ancient Propaganda and Historical Criticism" in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century*, J. S. Cooper and R. M. Schwartz, ed. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 283-89; and P. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983), pp. 719-37; and for ideology and propaganda in Assyrian visual imagery, I .J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), pp. 2-38; *idem*, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, P. O. Harper and H. Pittman, ed. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), pp. 15-31, and J. E. Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda," in Larsen, *Power and Propaganda*, pp. 329-43. See also I. J. Winter, "Art as Evidence for Interaction: Relations between the Assyrian Empire and North Syria," in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn*, H. J. Nissen and J. Renger, ed. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982), n. 100, who notes that Assyrian royal monuments, and the Sam'al stele in particular, "could also consciously address a Western audience."

Aramean tribe of Bit-Adini. Strategically important, Til Barsip controlled the Euphrates River crossing just south of the powerful city of Carchemish on a major route linking the north Syrian plains and the Mediterranean; in addition, the Euphrates valley connected the city to fortresses of the north (Fig. 3). This situation made it a natural base for controlling both trade and military movements in the region, making Til Barsip an early target of Assyrian conquest.[150] Captured by Shalmaneser III in 856 B.C., Til Barsip was promptly declared an Assyrian royal city and placed under the rule of an Assyrian general.[151] Shalmaneser also ordered the construction of a palace at Til Barsip to serve as his royal residence in the west; the Assyrian palace

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[150] For a brief introduction to the material and documentary evidence for the city in the Assyrian period and for further bibliography, see Guy Bunnens, "Til Barsib under Assyrian Domination: A Brief Account of the Melbourne University Excavations at Tell Ahmar," *Assyria 1995*, S. Parpola and R. Whiting, ed., pp. 17-28. For discussions of the history of both Til Barsip and Sam'al, with bibliography, see J. D. Hawkins, "The Neo-Hittite States in Syria and Anatolia," *Cambridge Ancient History* III/I, J. Boardman et al., ed., 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 372-441; H. Sader, *Les Etats araméens de Syrie* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1987); and P.-E. Dion, *Les Araméens à l'âge du fer: Histoire politique et structures sociales,* Etudes Bibliques, n.s. 34 (Paris: Librairie Le Coffre, 1997).

[151] Most of the Assyrian and native texts for reconstructing the city's history are conveniently collected and translated (as a whole or as excerpts) in Sader, *Les Etats araméens,* pp. 55-77. For complete texts of Shalmaneser III's inscriptions, see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858-745 BC)*, RIMA, v. 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 5-179. For the appointment of Til Barsip's first Assyrian ruler, see A. Livingstone, ed., *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), p. 44, ll. 8-13. Later Assyrian governors attested include the ninth century official Ninurta-bel-uṣur, named in his own bilingual lion inscriptions from Arslan Tash as governor of Til Barsip under Shamshi-Adad (823-811 B.C.) (Dion, *Les Araméens,* pp. 96-98); the very powerful late ninth or early eighth century general and city ruler Shamshi-ilu, named in his own inscriptions from Til Barsip (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib,* pp. 141-151, with text; A. Roobaert, "The City Gate Lions," in *Tell Ahmar: 1988 Season*, Guy Bunnens, ed., Abr-Nahrain Supplement Series 2 [Leuven: Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies, University of Melbourne, 1990], pp. 126-135; Dion, *Les Araméens,* pp. 95-97); an unnamed governor mentioned in two letters from the reign of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) (S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West*, SAA 1 [Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987], nos. 4 and 32); the eponym official for 701, named Hananu (A. R. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire, 910-612 BC*, SAAS II [Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994], p. 49), and Nabu-nadin-ahi, a governor of Kar-Shalmaneser (Til Barsip) and an eponym, probably in the year 647 B.C. (R. Whiting in *Eponyms*, A. Millard, ed., p. 74, and J. E. Reade, "Assyrian Eponyms, Kings and Pretenders, 648-605 BC," *Orientalia* 67 [1998], pp. 256-57). For the possibility that Manṣuate was an alternative name for the city and that its governor, eponym for 680, was thus a governor of Til Barsip under Esarhaddon, see S. Dalley, *Abr-Nahrain* 34 (1996-97), pp. 69-70. For alternative locations for Manṣuate, see N. Na'aman, "Province System and Settlement Pattern in Southern Syria and Palestine in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *Neo-Assyrian Geography*, M. Liverani, ed. (Rome: Università di Roma "La Sapienza," 1995), p. 104.

on the citadel at Til Barsip that succeeded Shalmaneser's residence, decorated with some of the most spectacular Assyrian wall paintings ever discovered, attested to the city's continuing importance over almost two centuries as an Assyrian center in the west.[152] Politically, Til Barsip became in a short time essentially Assyrian. Although the governor-general who ruled the city during the prolonged period of Assyrian weakness following Shalmaneser's reign exercised great independent power in the west, the city made no attempt to break away from the Assyrian empire and reassert its independence, even when cities in the Assyrian homeland revolted against the king.[153] From the time of its conquest in 856 B.C. until the fall of the empire more than two hundred years later, Til Barsip, ruled by Assyrian officials and serving as a center of Assyrian administration, remained consistently loyal to Assyria.[154]

Culturally as well, the city became highly Assyrianized, while retaining some sense of western identity. In pottery and architecture, Til Barsip became strikingly Assyrian in character; Guy Bunnens, the director of the renewed excavations at the site, notes that to a striking degree the city's material culture in the seventh century is Assyrian, essentially indistinguishable from that of cities in the Assyrian homeland.[155] Although its uniformly As-

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[152] The date of construction of the Assyrian palace (or palaces) at Til Barsip is debated, in part because of controversy about the dating of the palace frescoes, which in whole or in part have been assigned dates ranging from the time of Tiglath-pileser III to that of Assurbanipal or later. For discussions and bibliography, see Winter, "Art as Evidence for Interaction," n. 63; A. Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Near East*, trans. Judith Filson (London: Phaidon, 1969), pp. 140-43; J. E. Reade, "The Neo-Assyrian Court and Army," *Iraq* 34 (1972), p. 89; and Y. Tomabechi, "Wall Paintings from Til Barsip," *AfO* 29-30 (1983-84), pp. 63-74. Shalmaneser probably used the palace of the city's previous rulers initially, and Bunnens notes (in private correspondence) that the Assyrian palace excavated by the French must date from late in the Assyrian period and that earlier remains labelled "Aramean" by the French excavators may include earlier Assyrian levels as well as pre-Assyrian remains.

[153] For the period when the city was ruled by the semi-independent Assyrian-appointed governor Shamshi-ilu, see Dion, *Les Araméens*, pp. 95-96 and 129-32, with bibliography; Dalley, *Abr-Nahrain* 34 (1996-97), p. 69; and Y. Ikeda, "Looking from Til Barsip on the Euphrates: Assyria and the West in 9th and 8th Centuries B.C.," to appear in the proceedings of the Second Colloquium on the Ancient Near East, 1996, "The City and Its Life," Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan.

[154] The city's feeling toward its Assyrian rulers, however, may not always have been entirely cordial, as is suggested by the apparent ritual assassination of a statue of an Assyrian high official, found buried on the tell, dating perhaps to the time of Sargon II; see A. Roobaert, "A Neo-Assyrian Statue from Til Barsib," *Iraq* 58 (1996), pp. 79-87.

[155] G. Bunnens, *Assyria 1995*, p. 10; for his summary of the current excavations with further bibliography, pp. 17-28. For the results of the first excavation, see Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib* (see above, n. 2); for preliminary reports on the renewed excavations, see Bunnens, *Tell Ahmar 1988 Season*; *idem*, "Tall Aḥmar/Til Barsip, 1988-1992," *AfO* 40-41 (1993-94), pp. 221-225; and for a popular account, Carlo Zaccagnini,

syrian material culture might suggest that the city had become an enclave of Assyrian bureaucrats and soldiers living in the west, it seems more likely to reflect a thoroughgoing adoption of Assyrian practices by the city's western residents, since there is no suggestion in Assyrian inscriptions that residents of the city were ever deported,[156] and since documentary evidence, in contrast to the city's material culture, suggests the continued presence of some westerners in the city and province who seem to have retained some ties to western culture. The documentary evidence from the city is limited to a single family's archive of nineteen texts, some fragmentary, but these provide at least a glimpse of the population of the city at about the time of Esarhaddon's reign.[157] While most of the texts are written in the Assyrians' language, Akkadian, two of them are written in Aramaic, the common language of the west, indicating the continued occasional use of western language in the city, even for formal business records, despite the presence of an Assyrian governor and garrison in the city for well over a century. Although the use of the Aramaic language and of Aramean names was increasing in Assyria in the late Neo-Assyrian period, the mixture of Aramean and Assyrian names in the Til Barsip texts, often designating people participating as equals in a single transaction, suggests the presence of a mixed population, including westerners, in the city. Even some of the Assyrian names in the texts, such as Hamataya ("the man from Hamat," a nearby western city) and Tabalaya ("the man from Tabal," a nearby province), attest to the continuing presence of westerners in the city. Several names cited in the texts include the theophoric element "Adad" or "Hadad," the name of an important weather god in the west, and one names the moon god Sîn, worshipped in Assyria but also the focus of an important cult in the nearby city of Harran, suggesting that the religious ties of the city's residents were also to some extent still influenced by western practice. A similar presence of Aramean names, western theophoric elements in names, and legal texts written in Aramaic is evident in the much larger collection of clay tablets – some 130 altogether – now discovered in Neo-Assyrian levels at the neighboring site of Tell Shiukh Fawqani. These marks of

"Sulla Collina Rossa," *Archeo* 10 (Sept., 1995), pp. 24-32. For a detailed study of the Neo-Assyrian period pottery from the site, see Andrew S. Jamieson, "Neo-Assyrian Pottery from Tell Ahmar," *Iron Age Pottery in Northern Mesopotamia, Northern Syria and Southeastern Anatolia*, A. Hausleiter and A. Reiche, ed. (Muenster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999) and *idem*, "Area D Pottery 1989-90," forthcoming. I am grateful to Mr. Jamieson for allowing me to see these articles before their publication and for his exemplary introduction to the Tell Ahmar pottery at the site.

[156] Shalmaneser's inscriptions record the absorption of troops from Til Barsip into the Assyrian army when the city fell, but say nothing about deporting other residents.

[157] Texts in the archive dated to 683, 658 and 650 B.C. suggest it covers a period of about 40 years, including all of the eleven-year reign of Esarhaddon.

western cultural links suggest that the province ruled from Til Barsip, like the city itself, was still partially bilingual and still identified itself to some extent with the west despite the long-established Assyrian presence.[158] The documentary and archaeological evidence from the city and region together suggest that the local audience for the steles erected at Til Barsip consisted of people who still to some extent identified themselves as westerners while enthusiastically embracing many elements of Assyrian culture and remaining deeply loyal to Assyria politically.

Sam'al's situation was different. More isolated in a valley at the foot of the Amanus Mountains some 120 kilometers to the northwest (Fig. 3), Sam'al was less important than Til Barsip for control of the west and was therefore subjected to less Assyrian control and presence. The city formally submitted to the Assyrians for the first time in 856 B.C., even before Til Barsip fell, but was allowed to retain a measure of independence as a vassal of Assyria, paying tribute and sending troops to support Assyrian military endeavors in the west, but still directly ruled by its own native kings.[159] As a result, Sam'al remained much less Assyrianized than Til Barsip, both politically and culturally.

In the century and a half of vassaldom that followed their city-state's submission to Assyria, the kings of Sam'al built a series of impressive palaces and porticoed buildings in the city, all of them firmly western rather than Assyrian in style,[160] and they continued to erect their own royal monuments, inscribing them in languages of the west, first Phoenician and later

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[158] Til Barsip's earlier native rulers had used the Luwian language for their inscriptions. Although the city was, according to Assyrian texts, controlled by the Aramean tribe of Bit-Adini at the time of Shalmaneser's conquest, this was apparently brief, and its later use of Aramaic and the presence of Aramean names is not a survival of the city's own early traditions, but rather a mark of its links in later times to the contemporary culture and language of the western regions. See G. Bunnens, "Hittites and Arameans at Til Barsib: A Reappraisal," *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipiński*, K. van Lerberghe and A. Schoors, ed. (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1995), pp. 20-27. The texts from Til Barsip are published and discussed in *Abr-Nahrain* 34 (1996-97). For their archeological context, see G. Bunnens, pp. 61-65; for the Assyrian texts, S. M. Dalley, pp. 66-99; for the Aramaic texts, P. Bordreuil and F. Briquel-Chatonnet, pp. 100-107. For the texts from Tell Shiukh Fawqani, see the publication by F. M. Fales, "An Aramaic Tablet from Tell Shioukh Fawqani, Syria," *Semitica* 46 (1996), pp. 81-121 and pl. 10, and the descriptions by L. Bachelot *et al.* in *Orient Express* (1995/3), p. 83, in *Archeo* (1996/10), p. 105, in *Orient Express* (1996/3), pp. 80-84, and in *Orient Express* (1997/3), pp. 82-83.

[159] For a survey of the city's history and for bibliography, see J. D. Hawkins, in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., pp. 372-441; Dion, *Les Araméens*, pp. 99-111; and Sader, *Les Etats araméens*, Ch. IV, who includes texts or excerpts with citations; for the excavation reports, F. von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen von Sendschirli* (n. 144, above).

[160] See Sader, *Les Etats araméens*, pp. 181-184, and H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1956), pp. 170-171.

the native Sam'alian dialect, rather than in the language of their Assyrian overlords.[161] Despite traces of Assyrian influence, the carvings that decorated these monuments attest to the vigorous survival of a local artistic tradition. Even when the ninth century Sam'alian ruler Kilamuwa was represented on a stele dressed as an Assyrian king, the style of the carving remained unmistakably western; a second stele, probably also representing Kilamuwa, shows the Sam'alian king in the fringed dress of the Assyrian court but wearing the cap of a western ruler and with the strikingly large head and compressed upper-body characteristic of the local style. Local style is even more evident in the late eighth century orthostat representing the king Bar-rakib, which is almost entirely free of Assyrian influence, although it was carved after more than a century of Assyrian domination of the city.[162] Even the pottery from Sam'al remained almost exclusively local in style rather than Assyrian during the city's years as an Assyrian vassal.[163] In short, Sam'al retained its native culture largely intact despite a century and a half of Assyrian domination.

Politically, it was for many years a loyal vassal of Assyria according to both native and Assyrian reports, but retained a strong sense of independent political identity. After two bloody battles, the king of Sam'al, defeated along with more powerful allies, had submitted to Shalmaneser for the first time in 858 B.C., bringing tribute, and after further Assyrian campaigning had dealt a mortal blow to the anti-Assyrian coalition in northern Syria, submitted once more in 853 B.C. and again had annual tribute imposed on him, this time apparently for good. Sam'al seems thereafter to have behaved as a loyal vassal; Assyrian royal inscriptions mention the city's payment of

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[161] For these native royal inscriptions, which were written throughout the period of Assyrian domination from ca. 830 B.C. until the end of Bar-rakib's reign in the last quarter of the eighth century, see Sader, *Les Etats arameéns,* pp. 156-171.

[162] For Bar-rakib's relief, see Frankfort, *Art and Architecture*, pl. 162; Kilamua's large, inscribed stele shows him with the crown and pendants of an Assyrian king, but with the deeply carved eye and curving, not circular, hair locks of Sam'alian artistic convention. For the second stele, uninscribed but almost certainly representing Kilamuwa as well, see H. Klengel, ed., *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasien* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), fig. 194. All three carvings are in the collections of the Vorderasiatishes Museum, Berlin.

[163] F. von Luschan, with publication and completion by W. Andrae, *Die Kleinfunde von Sendschirli* , Ausgrabungen von Sendschirli V (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1943) and Dion, *Les Araméens*, p. 103, n. 100. The recent study of the pottery of the city by Gunnar Lehmann, *Untersuchungen zur späten Eisenzeit in Syrien und Libanon: Stratigraphie und Keramikformen zwischen ca. 700 bis 300 v. Chr.* (Munster: Ugarit Verlag, 1996) was unfortunately not available to me. The Assyrian pottery and small objects found in the city are few and probably date from the period of resident Assyrian governors. Only two clay tablets written in Assyrian were found in the city (see Andrae, pp. 136-37), and none in Sam'alian, so there is little onomastic evidence to supplement the evidence of the material culture.

tribute to the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in 738 B.C., over a century later, and are silent about any problems in the long intervening period. The inscriptions of Sam'al's kings on their part strike a nice balance between acknowledging their dependence on Assyria on the one hand and presenting themselves as the proud leaders of a vigorous state on the other. An inscription written in about 830 B.C., in the early years of Assyrian domination, for example, presents a picture of King Kilamua as an essentially independent ruler, mentioning only in passing that he had applied to the Assyrian king for help against the king of the Danunians; the accompanying bas-relief, as we have seen, shows him dressed as an Assyrian king, as if to imply that Kilamuwa was the Assyrian king's royal equivalent – at least in Sam'al. Almost a century later the inscriptions of King Bar-rakib depict Sam'alian kings as locally powerful, but lay greater emphasis on their role as Assyrian vassal, reporting that Bar-rakib's father had been reinstated on his throne by the king of Assyria and had later died in battle at Damascus supporting the Assyrians, and adding that Bar-rakib, like his father, was proud to run with kings beside the Assyrian king's chariot. The image of Bar-rakib that emerges from the text is of a ruler whose faithfulness to Assyria strengthens his own prestige as ruler of a city that had retained a lively sense of its own political identity despite its long and apparently happy association with Assyria.

At some point before Esarhaddon came to the throne, however, there was a radical change in the relationship of the two states, and Sam'al was reduced to the status of a province ruled by a resident Assyrian governor. The timing and reasons for this change are unclear, although an attempted or at least suspected Sam'alian rebellion seems likely. There is no mention of such a rebellion however in either native or Assyrian inscriptions in this period, which report nothing after the city's apparently routine payment of tribute in 738 B.C.[164] Although this silence leaves us without clues to the reason, there is no doubt that by the time Esarhaddon came to the throne, Sam'al had ceased to be ruled by its own kings, since several legal docu-

[164] The only reported incident in which the city appears to have acted against Assyrian interests is Sam'al's participation in 796 B.C. in the siege of a western city by a coalition of 16 western states, probably dispersed by the Assyrian king Adad-nerari III (reported in an inscription of the Aramean king Zakkur: H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964], no. 202A and Dion, *Les Araméens*, p.129). Although this suggests the city was relatively autonomous in this period of Assyrian weakness, there is no indication that the attack was directly anti-Assyrian in intent, and neither Assyrian nor Sam'alian inscriptions mention the incident. In any case, Sam'al was still (or again) a tribute-paying vassal sixty years later when Bar-rakib's inscriptions boast of the city's close relationship to Assyria.

ments from 681 B.C., the final year of Esarhaddon's father, refer to an Assyrian governor of Sam'al.[165]

Since its reduction to the status of province suggests that in the not too distant past it had proven less than loyal to Assyria, Sam'al's reliability as a western province in the early days of Esarhaddon's reign could probably not be taken for granted. To add to Assyrian doubts about Sam'al's loyalty, a king of the cities of Kundu and Sissu in Cilicia, a region linked to Sam'al by road and only about 60 kilometers away, then chose to ally himself with the Phoenician king Abdi-Milkutti of Sidon (later to be pictured as a captive on Esarhaddon's steles) and revolt against Esarhaddon in 677 B.C. Although the revolt was briskly suppressed and its leaders beheaded, the episode underlined the precariousness of Assyrian control in the more isolated northwestern regions of the empire and suggested that Sam'al in particular might be under considerable pressure to join in a regional uprising in the near future.

Although the evidence is ambiguous, Sam'al may in fact have succumbed to this pressure shortly thereafter. A thick layer of rubble and ashes attests to a violent destruction of several buildings on the citadel of Sam'al, followed by extensive rebuilding. A dated tablet found in the debris places the destruction sometime after the year 676 B.C., part way through Esarhaddon's reign, and pottery associated with the rebuilding indicates it occurred sometime in the seventh century, but the failure of the excavations to establish a clear stratigraphic sequence in the area where Esarhaddon's stele was erected makes it impossible to establish whether the destruction and later rebuilding occurred under Esarhaddon or in the time of his successors. G. Lehmann plausibly dates the destruction to shortly after 676 B.C., arguing that Esarhaddon's stele was erected to celebrate his recapture of Sam'al – either from rebellious Sam'alians or invading outsiders – but the ambiguity of the archaeological evidence leaves this solution uncertain, if appealing.[166] Whether the violent destruction of the citadel at Sam'al

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[165] Eight legal documents from 681 B.C. name the governor of Sam'al: T. Kwasman and S. Parpola, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I*, SAA VI (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1991), texts no. 46, 47, 91, 110, 193, 195, 196 and probably 194. A fragmentary text of Sargon II (K. 1672) mentions Sam'al beside cities that were already capitals of Assyrian provinces, which Landsberger interpreted as an indication that Sam'al had already become a province by the late eighth century (for the text, see B. Landsberger, *Sam'al: Studien zur Entdeckung der Ruinenstätte Karatepe* [Ankara: Türkische Historische Gesellschaft, 1948], p. 73).

[166] G. Lehmann, "Zu den Zerstörungen in Zincirli während des frühen 7. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 126 (1994), pp. 105-122. Luschan's excavation of the gate in which the stele was found leaves it unclear whether the stele was erected in the gate before or after the widespread destruction of buildings on the citadel; the late Assyrian pottery associated with the rebuilding would permit a date for the rebuilding either in Esarhaddon's reign or that of his son. The destruction

should be dated to Esarhaddon's reign or slightly later, it clearly points to the precariousness of Assyria's control of the city at the time of Esarhaddon's reign. The local audience for Esarhaddon's stele at Sam'al was thus one with a still vigorous sense of non-Assyrian cultural identity and one whose political loyalty to Assyria was at least questionable.

The cultural and political situation in the two cities was thus quite different at the time the three steles were erected. As western provincial capitals, however, the cities did share a common interest in Assyria's ability to protect her western cities against attacks from the empire's enemies; the steles and the common scene represented on them seem designed in part to address this common concern.

All three steles conveyed an image of Assyrian power by their very massiveness. The stele erected at Sam'al weighs more than 6,000 kilograms. Mounted on a massive stone base 1.11 meters high, the stele itself stood 3.46 meters high, dominating the gatehouse in which it was erected.[167] The stele placed near the citadel at Til Barsip was even larger, standing 3.80 meters high on a base that was 1.10 meters in height,[168] while the stele inside the city's eastern gate was only slightly smaller.[169] The looming presence of the three massive steles was a potent reminder of Assyrian presence and power in both cities.

The scene on all three steles reinforced this message of Assyrian dominance. On the face of each stele the crowned figure of Esarhaddon, more than six feet high, looms over the captives placed in front of him, whose heads scarcely reach to his waist. Staring implacably in front of him, he seems oblivious to the royal captives at his feet (Pl. 15).[170] The effect of the

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and rebuilding of the citadel could thus have occurred after the erection of the stele and thus after Esarhaddon's reign, although Lehmann's hypothesis of destruction in Esarhaddon's time is plausible. One possibility is that the city was taken by Mugallu, who was the subject of twelve Assyrian omen inquiries inquiring about the probable outcome of his battles with western Tabal, his (evidently successful) siege of the city-state of Meliddu (not far north of Sam'al and linked to it by road), and his proposed diplomatic marriage arrangement with the Assyrian king. Esarhaddon sent troops to besiege Mugallu in Meliddu in the year 675 B.C., according to the Babylonian Chronicles, which would make particular sense if Mugallu had just seized nearby Sam'al from Assyria, with or without Sam'alian collusion. I am grateful to Nadav Na'aman for drawing my attention to Lehmann's article and for his perceptive comments about it.

[167] Luschan, *Ausgrabungen von Sendschirli*, I, p. 2, n. 3, and p. 14.

[168] Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib*, p. 151.

[169] It stood 3.30 meters high on a stone pedestal 2.40 meters in height (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib*, p. 155).

[170] On the Sam'al stele and the stele near the Til Barsip citadel the field in front of the king's face is filled with images and emblems of Assyrian gods, whom he appears to salute with the raised object in his hand. The stele placed near the gate at Til Barsip, however, is blank in this area. This difference may be a response to the different audiences who

scene as a whole is one of effortless dominance, while the images of Esarhaddon's newly appointed heirs standing with folded hands on the side panels of each stele implied that Assyrian dominance would continue long after Esarhaddon's death.

The message of the scene was specifically one of Assyrian dominance in the west, a point made by carefully identifying the captive figures as western princes whose countries had recently opposed Assyria and been defeated. Abdi-Milkutti, the Phoenician rebel whose revolt against Esarhaddon had been summarily suppressed in 677 B.C., is identified both by his Phoenician hat and by his captive state (which distinguished him from a later Phoenician rebel, King Ba'al of Tyre, who had eventually submitted to the Assyrians after an embarrassingly long resistance, so effective that he was allowed to remain free and on his throne).[171] The Egyptian prince, the most spectacular trophy of the recent Egyptian campaign, was Nubian and is clearly identified both by his Negroid features, unusual in Assyrian reliefs, and by the uraeus crown of Egypt that he wears. The defeat of Egypt, represented by his kneeling form, signalled the elimination of Egypt as Assyria's last significant challenger for control of the west after more than

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would see the steles in these two locations, with the images of Assyrian gods omitted for the general public who passed through the city gate, but included for the reassurance or intimidation of those who were about to pass into the presence of Assyrian officials on the citadel.

[171] This is not immediately evident from Esarhaddon's inscriptions, which gloss over Ba'al's apparently successful resistance. Significantly, Esarhaddon's Frt. F inscription (Borger, *IAK*, p. 112, obv., ll. 12-14) records the Assyrian siege of Ba'al, who had allied with the Egyptian pharaoh against Assyria, as the first part of the successful campaign to Egypt in 671, but does not mention any outcome of the siege – suggesting that the Assyrians were still trying to get Ba'al to capitulate and abandon his island fortress city at the time when this inscription was composed. In a probably later text (AsBbE, ll. 7-8; Borger, *IAK*, p. 86), Esarhaddon claims to have defeated Ba'al and taken away "all his cities and his belongings"; the more detailed, but broken, account in Frt. A (rev., ll. 2-10), however, reports Ba'al's submission to Assyria, his sending of tribute and of daughters with dowry, and the Assyrian seizure of his shore towns, but significantly does not mention either the taking of Tyre itself or the seizing of Ba'al as a captive. Since Abdi-Milkutti, for similar resistance, was seized and beheaded as well as losing his capital, it seems likely that Ba'al had resisted the Assyrians' siege successfully in his walled island city and that they had been forced to come to terms with him, allowing him his freedom and rule while obliging him to give up those cities they could take. It is not clear, in that case, whether the sending of his daughters to Assyria was a payment of tribute, as the Assyrian inscription implies, or a diplomatic marriage to seal the agreement. Ba'al continued to reign into the time of Esarhaddon's son Assurbanipal. This suggests that the Assyrians would have found Ba'al a less instructive example for westerners than the thoroughly subdued (and in fact beheaded) Abdi-Milkutti and were careful to establish the identity of the captive Phoenician king on the steles, even placing his name beneath his feet on one Til Barsip stele, as Thureau-Dangin notes (*Syria* 10 [1929], p. 152).

forty years of Egyptian support for western uprisings against Assyria;[172] even more important, it signalled the recovery of Assyria's military position in the west. Although Esarhaddon never mentions it in his own inscriptions, his army had been defeated in Egypt on a first campaign in 674 B.C.;[173] the image of Egypt's kneeling prince, publicly displayed in both cities, was part of an essential effort to repair Assyria's tarnished military reputation in the west with the message that Assyria had now proven invincible after all. Abdi-Milkutti's presence served a similar function, reminding Til Barsip and Sam'al that their rebellious western colleague had been swiftly and inexorably defeated. That he had also been beheaded is omitted from the reliefs as a tactful concession to western sensibilities. His defeat and subjection, however, are unmistakable, reinforcing the message of Assyria's firm control of the west.

Although the scene conveyed this basic message of Assyrian dominance in the west on all three steles, the treatment of the figures represented in the scenes was quite different in the two cities, significantly changing the implications of the visual imagery. Despite weathering, which has obscured details of the Til Barsip steles, the differences between the carvings in the two cities are clearly apparent. At Til Barsip, for example (Pls. 15, 16, 17 and 18),[174] the Assyrian king, his two sons and both captives all wear long, Assyrian-style tunics – the king's distinguished by overlapping front panels suggesting a coat cut along similar lines – and all four men wear the same squared-off, typically Assyrian beard, sometimes worn by westerners as well. The imagery here is inclusive, suggesting a close relationship between the Assyrians and their western subjects.

The two Assyrian heirs on the side panels of the two steles are represented at Til Barsip as generic Assyrians, simply dressed and without elaborate jewelry (Pls. 19, 20, 21 and 23), distinguished only by the Assyrian crown prince's pendant, identical to that of the king, which hangs down the Assyrian heir's back (Pls. 19 and 22), and by the Babylonian heir's more

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[172] For further discussion, see Anthony Spalinger, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt Preceding the Assyrian Conquest," *Chronique d'Égypte* 53 (1978), pp. 22-47.

[173] It is reported only in the Babylonian chronicles; see A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Texts from Cuneiform Sources V (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1975), Chronicle 1, iv 16.

[174] Clear pictures of the Til Barsip steles have long been needed. I am indebted to Anwar Abdel Ghafour, photographer for the National Museum of Aleppo, for his superb new photographs of the steles, most of which are published here, and to Mr. Wahid Khayata, Director of the Aleppo Museum, and Prof. Dr. Sultan Mehesen, Director General, Directorate of Antiquities, The Syrian Arab Republic, for permitting these photographs to be made and allowing their publication here.

arching pendant[175] (Pls. 16 and 23) and heavy sash with tassel (Pl. 24). These images of the two princes, which would have been equally appropriate for an audience in the Assyrian homeland, seem designed to encourage Til Barsip to accept and support Esarhaddon's heirs simply because they are Assyrian princes.

The western rulers on the Til Barsip steles are both accorded a certain dignity. Their hands are raised in a gesture as much of salute as of appeal, and their heads tilt back only slightly, so that they appear to stare woodenly at the king's belt, not beseechingly at his face (Pls. 25 and 26). Even the more foreign Egyptian prince, although his kneeling posture emphasizes his subjection, is decently dressed in a tunic (Pl. 27) and not otherwise demeaned. The two Til Barsip steles represent the captive western rulers with a certain dignity while nevertheless indicating by their captivity and small stature that opposition to Assyria in the west would be firmly suppressed – a message that Til Barsip, its political fortunes long tied to those of Assyria, could only have found reassuring.[176] The imagery of the Til Barsip

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[175] Although both are badly weathered, a close examination of the two steles shows traces of this different pendant hanging down the back of the prince on the right panel. (It is not discernible in published photos and was not included in the drawing of the citadel stele published by J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen*, fig. 217 [Pl. 18 here]). Traces of the pendant are however visible on the stele itself and appear faintly in Ghafour's new photo of it, Pl. 23 here. On the gateway stele, the pendant arches slightly away from the back of the figure on the right panel (somewhat more than in the published drawing, Pl. 16 here), differentiating it from the pendant of the king and the other prince. The point of attachment of this pendant is also different. On the stele set up by the gate, the back of the figure's head is broken away so that the point where the pendant would have been attached is missing, but on the stele near the citadel, the pendant clearly begins at the midpoint of the prince's hair bun, unlike the pendants of the king and the other prince, which hang from the base of the bun. The different pendant of the right-hand figure, like his sash, probably distinguished him as the heir for Babylon, since it differs from the conventional pendant of Assyrian kings and crown princes worn by the other figures. The conclusion that the heir for Babylon is the one with the unconventional pendant and sash is supported by the fact that the king has his back to this figure and faces the figure with the more conventional pendant, who is probably the more prestigious heir to the crown of Assyria, as in the arrangement on the Sam'al stele.

[176] The visual imagery of the steles at Til Barsip was supplemented by the imagery of the wall paintings in the Assyrian palace on the citadel. Although the dating of these is still hotly debated, it is clear that at least some, and perhaps all, were on display to visitors to the palace in Esarhaddon's time (see note 152 above; for illustrations, see Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib,* pls. XLIII-LIII, and for initial reports of their discovery, pp. 42-72; for color reproductions of the few surviving originals and of copies made at the time of discovery, see Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria, passim.*) Closely resembling the carvings in Assyrian homeland palaces, the paintings include scenes of the Assyrian king and court receiving booty or tribute, scenes of the royal hunt, of captives pulling chariots, of the execution of a dark-skinned prisoner, and of a group of naked women or goddesses, and various arrangements of winged genii, winged animals, ibexes, and geometric patterns; unlike the homeland carvings, however, they omit scenes of war, making

steles was essentially inclusive, encouraging the people of Til Barsip to continue in their loyal support of the Assyrian king and his heirs.

On the Sam'al stele the figures in the scene are treated quite differently (Pls. 28 and 29).[177] Sam'al, with its strong local cultural and political identity, would probably not have been pleased by images showing almost everyone as essentially Assyrian, and on this stele the differing ethnic and national identities of the figures are underlined. Esarhaddon is identified as Assyrian not only by his distinctively Assyrian crown – to which attention is drawn here by its extensive decoration – but also by the elaborately fringed and wrapped Assyrian royal garment that he wears, contrasting with the simple tunic and peaked cap of the Phoenician king.[178] The square Assyrian beards of both the king and his sons distinguish them from Abdi-Milkutti, who here wears a pointed beard, underlining his non-Assyrian character (Pl. 30).

Cultural differences are further underlined in the representations of Esarhaddon's two sons on the side panels, where the heir to the Assyrian throne is shown in elaborate Assyrian royal dress like that of his father, while his brother, heir to the Babylonian throne, wears a Babylonian back-pleated garment[179] and an unusual back pendant with zig-zag decoration (Pl. 31). The aesthetic conventions governing the carving of the figures of the two princes are also adapted to appeal to Sam'al; in contrast to the

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them more peaceful in the image they present of Assyria's relationship to the outside. Their imagery sends a message similar to that of the steles. Like the steles, the paintings present an image of Assyrian royal power and of an orderly empire whose king was under divine protection, and they are, with only two exceptions, neither degrading nor violent in their presentation of nonetheless clearly submissive subjects or captives.

177 I am grateful to Dr. Evelyn Klengel-Brandt and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, for providing me with this photograph of the Sam'al stele in their collection and also for making it possible to photograph details of the stele and publish those photos here.

178 The position of the king on the face of the steles also differs in the two cities, with the king facing right on the Sam'al stele and left on the two Til Barsip steles. This is probably not related to a difference in intended message, but to the placement of the steles within each city, since in this arrangement the king would in each case face the viewer as he approached. (For the position of the steles, see for Sam'al the plan of the outer citadel gate, F. von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen in Sendschirli*, II, pl. XIII, along with the drawing, *ibid.*, I, Fig. 10, p. 29. For Til Barsip, see Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib*, pp. 151 and 155, with the city plan, Plan A, and Thureau-Dangin, *Syria* 10 (1929), pp. 189-90.) I am indebted to Felix Blocher for noting that the placement of the king on the viewer's left is typical of royal steles at Sam'al and may be a nod to local practice.

179 Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, *Til-Barsib*, p. 152 and J. E. Reade, s.v. "Kronprinz," *RlA* 6 (1982), p. 250. The garment is shown on the *kudurru* monuments of the ninth century Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-shumi (Parrot, *Arts of Assyria*, fig. 217) and the eighth century king Merodach-baladan II (*ibid.*, fig. 216).

figures on the front of the stele, carved with the conventional Assyrian proportions, the two princes are carved with the large head and oddly compressed upper body that was a mark of western style (Pls. 31 and 32).[180] Despite their distinctive and differing native dress, the proportions of the two Assyrian princes give them a strikingly western appearance, as if to encourage their acceptance in Sam'al by presenting them almost as Sam'alian natives.

The treatment of the captives is also strikingly different here, this time underlining the captives' abject state (Pl. 28). At Til Barsip, the captives stand waist-high beside the king; at Sam'al they are tiny figures, reaching only to his knees. At Til Barsip, the Egyptian prince is decently clothed in a tunic (Pl. 27); here, the absence of any hemline across the prince's lower leg and his strongly modelled leg muscles suggest he is naked except for his royal crown. At Sam'al, two clearly carved leashes coiled in the Assyrian king's lower hand run to rings that appear to pierce the captives' lips,[181] and heavy, unadorned bands around the captives' wrists and ankles, absent on the Til Barsip steles, appear to represent manacles rather than jewelry. The captives' heads here are thrown back so that they appear to look beseechingly at the face of the impervious Assyrian king. In an ironic twist, the scribe who laid out the text left large spaces in this line so that the word

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[180] In the western style the head is often shown as the same height as the entire torso. In one of the Sam'al gatehouse carvings, for example, the soldier's head is 7 1/2" high, and his neck to waist measurement is exactly the same. Other figures show similar proportions. For additional examples, see the three gateway figures from Sam'al pictured in Frankfort, *Art and Architecture,* pl. 160, and the stele showing Kilamuwa, discussed above. On western style in general, see Winter, "Art as Evidence for Interaction," (n. 149 above), p. 368.

[181] The surface in front of the captives' faces on the two Til Barsip steles is completely blank and shows no lip rings. Whether leashes were depicted is unclear because of the damaged condition of the area above the figures on both steles, although no trace of leashes now survives. (I was unable to find any clear indication of the traces of leashes shown in Börker-Klähn's drawing of the Til Barsip gate stele when I examined the stele in the Aleppo Museum.) The surface in this area is badly pitted and weathered. This section of the stele near the citadel is almost completely broken away, so that it is not possible to be sure what was or was not originally carved there. (The looped leashes on the gate stele in the photographs are a modern reconstruction.) Thureau-Dangin speaks of prisoners being held "en laisse par le roi" on this stele, but it is not clear if he saw surviving traces of such a leash (now long gone) or was extrapolating from the evidence of the Sam'al stele and from the loop or circle that is still clearly visible in the king's hand. Since there are no nose rings on these steles and no clear evidence of leashes descending beyond the loop, the two Til Barsip steles, unlike the Sam'al stele, may have depicted only a loop and ring in the king's hand rather than leashes, echoing the "rod and ring" motif familiar from earlier Mesopotamian royal carvings. In any case, if leashes were originally indicated on the Til Barsip steles, they must have been only lightly indicated, since they have left no discernible trace. At Sam'al, however, the leashes are emphasized by strong modelling.

"Assur" is incised neatly on the upturned pointed beard of the Phoenician captive, as if labelling him as Assyrian property (Pl. 30).[182]

The Sam'al stele, in short, underlines the different national identities of the figures while emphasizing the degradation of the captive western princes. Its message seems intended as a pointed reminder to potentially disloyal subjects that opponents of Assyria – western or not – would be captured and demeaned. The more gruesome details of Abdi-Milkutti's punishment are tactfully omitted, but his subjection is underlined, and the message that revolt against Assyria would inevitably fail, with unpleasant consequences for the perpetrators, is made unmistakably clear.

The different texts inscribed on the steles in the two cities[183] are carefully integrated with the visual imagery, complementing and supplementing the message of the accompanying carvings. Although the inscription at Til Barsip is badly weathered and was perhaps deliberately mutilated in antiquity, large sections of it survive and its general outlines are clear. Its text is typical of Esarhaddon's inscriptions, closely paralleling sections of his building inscriptions from Nineveh, and like the visual imagery of the stele, would have been quite appropriate for an Assyrian homeland audience.[184] After an introduction, now destroyed by weathering, the text describes

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[182] The spacing of the signs in this line and the line before make it clear that this placement was deliberate. (See F. von Luschan, *Ausgrabungen in Sendschirli* I, Taf. IV, for a copy showing the lay-out of the signs; it does not, however, show the position of the carved figures in relation to the signs.) The ligature aš-šur was carefully isolated on the beard, separated from its pre- and post-position determinatives by space for a total of about three signs – more than enough space to have allowed a different placement of the signs if desired. For a second example on this stele of the placement of signs to interact with the visual images, see the discussion that follows. The implication that the word "Assur" on the beard was meant as an ironic property label is less conjectural than it may seem. Valuable objects taken as booty were sometimes similarly inscribed with a line of cuneiform labelling them as the property of the king who had seized them. (For the inscription on two alabaster vases found in the Alten Palast at Assur that identifies them as booty taken from Abdi-Milkutti, see Borger, *IAK,* p. 8, Assur D. The vases are in the collections of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.)

[183] No text was inscribed on the stele near the gate at Til Barsip, although one may have been planned. The text on the other Til Barsip stele breaks off abruptly, however, leaving ruled lines empty below it, and details of its carving are incomplete (the feet of the prince on the left-hand panel are only sketched), suggesting that the project of making steles for Til Barsip came to an abrupt end, perhaps because of Esarhaddon's sudden death in 669 B.C. Whatever was originally intended, only the stele near the citadel at Til Barsip was actually inscribed. Börker-Klähn's suggestion that an inscription in Aramaic (as well as leashes and symbols of gods, both missing on the stele near the gate) was to be added in paint is intriguing but seems unconvincing in the absence of other examples of painted details or texts on Assyrian stone steles.

[184] Borger, *IAK,* Mnm. B, pp. 100-101. The contents of the broken sections of the text can be approximately reconstructed, as Borger suggests, from the text's close parallels to sections of Esarhaddon's Nineveh A and B inscriptions.

Esarhaddon's kindnesses to a faithful Arab vassal, whose gods, plundered by Esarhaddon's father Sennacherib, Esarhaddon had refurbished and returned, whose female compatriot, also carried off by Sennacherib, Esarhaddon had returned and made queen, and whose son, deposed by a rival, Esarhaddon had later helped to reclaim the throne of his father, seizing the belongings of the hapless rival in the process. After establishing Esarhaddon's military prowess by extolling his various conquests (including his defeat of the nearby Cilicians), the text concludes with an account of Abdi-Milkutti's defeat at Esarhaddon's hands. This section of the text is set apart on the base of the stele as if to draw particular attention to it, and Abdi-Milkutti's name is placed directly below his carved figure, linking the text to the carvings it accompanies. These lines are now so badly weathered, however, that only Abdi-Milkutti's name and title at the beginning are clearly readable, but the eight lines of now-obliterated text that follow presumably told the story of his revolt and ignominious defeat, familiar to us from better preserved Esarhaddon inscriptions. After praising the god Assur and announcing the stele's construction, the text then breaks off with several ruled lines still uninscribed. Although it remains unfinished, probably because of Esarhaddon's death, the inscription's message is clear : it is the story of a faithful (and western) vassal rewarded and of a rebellious (and also western) vassal firmly punished. The Til Barsip inscription delivers a classic Assyrian message appropriate for loyal western Assyrian subjects: that as loyal subjects they will prosper under the rule of a benevolent and powerful Assyrian king who has already established his ability to protect them by defeating the enemies of Assyrian rule in the west.

The Sam'al text is predictably quite different. It focuses on a single campaign, Esarhaddon's recent conquest of Egypt, and its message, here again echoing the visual imagery, is one of warning. After listing Esarhaddon's divine patrons and royal titles (which now at last could include "king of the kings of Egypt, Patros, and Ethiopia," a pointed reminder of the kneeling Egyptian prince of the carving), the text then praises Esarhaddon as a fierce and successful warrior, again recalling the accompanying visual images by referring to him as "holder of the leashes of kings" (the word used here for "kings" is significantly not the Assyrian term, *šarrānū*, but its western equivalent, *malikū*). The placement of the cuneiform signs is also integrated with the carved images, not only in the case of the Phoenician king's beard, as we saw earlier, but also later in the text, where the comment that "all the non-submissive, the kings who would not bow to him, like swamp reed he cut down and trampled at his feet," is written in signs that themselves are placed neatly under the king's carved feet. After its lengthy assertions of Esarhaddon's divine protection and military prowess, the text turns at last to its main subject, Esarhaddon's defeat of Tarqu, pharaoh of Egypt,

who had "sinned against the god Assur, been disrespectful," a veiled reference to Eygpt's persistent support for western revolts. At great length the text describes the Assyrian army's difficult but determined desert crossing to Egypt, its pursuit of the fleeing pharaoh (adding that he was struck "five times" with arrows, a detail probably intended to obscure his later unmentioned escape to safety), and the rapid defeat of his army at Memphis. The text reports that Esarhaddon then looted Tarqu's palace, taking wives, children (including the unfortunate crown prince) and palace treasure, and finally appointed governors to rule the country for Assyria; it is, in short, the detailed account of a comprehensive defeat. The Sam'al inscription concludes by reporting the making of the stele itself, which is intended for "the wondering glance of all enemies forever" and to "make these deeds immortal".

Like the Til Barsip inscription, the Sam'al text tells a story of Assyrian power, but its moral is not one of faithfulness rewarded, but rather of disrespect – that is, efforts to foment rebellion – inexorably punished. Like its visual imagery, the message of the Sam'al inscription is not one meant for a loyal and trusted subject, but one that was explicitly designed for Assyria's potential enemies, a warning message appropriate for a city of doubtful loyalties which might well be under pressure to join in the next western revolt.

In both cities the differing messages of the steles were intended for public consumption. On permanent public display, the massive monuments were in themselves a looming and unavoidable reminder of Assyrian power. The scenes carved on the steles, cast in a familiar visual vocabulary, would have been comprehensible to almost anyone in the two cities. The texts, which required reading, would have been directly accessible to a smaller but more politically powerful audience of scribes and the people who employed them, a group that included Assyrian officials, foreign dignitaries, and members of wealthy families in both cities and their provinces. If the texts were also publicly read aloud during dedication ceremonies for the steles (which seems likely but remains hypothetical), the message of the texts would have eventually reached almost everyone in the two cities, either directly or eventually by word of mouth.[185] The intended audience for

[185] The use of Assyrian in western cities where Aramaic was the main language of the local population was probably not a serious barrier to understanding in either city, where knowledge of Assyrian had long been necessary for any powerful person (and also for less powerful people such as craftsmen, servants, etc.), a skill permitting local people to deal effectively in business and other matters with the city's Assyrian bureaucrats and numerous Assyrian residents. It is possible in addition that the texts were translated aloud into Aramaic during public dedication ceremonies for the steles, but this remains conjectural. See B. N. Porter,"Language, Audience and Impact in Imperial Assyria,"

the texts probably also included the Assyrian king and his nobles, their gods, and future rulers, as seems to have been the case for any Assyrian royal inscription, but people in the two cities where the texts were displayed were certainly part of their intended audience as well.

Both visually and verbally, Esarhaddon's carefully differentiated steles for Til Barsip and Sam'al addressed the different political and cultural circumstances of these audiences, encouraging the Til Barsipians on the one hand to remain confident and loyal citizens of the Assyrian empire, while encouraging the less reliable Sam'alians on the other hand to resist any future enticements to revolt. In addition, the images of the Assyrian princes on the sides of the steles, adapted to accommodate the cities' different cultural and political sensibilities, encouraged each city to support the princes as acceptable rulers of the empire after Esarhaddon's death.

As vehicles of Assyrian propaganda – public monuments part of whose purpose was to influence the political attitudes and behavior of people resident in the two cities and their provinces for Assyria's benefit – the steles shed light not only on Esarhaddon's western policy but also on Assyrian propaganda as a whole. The steles at Til Barsip and Sam'al are examples of a sophisticated public relations effort; they provide evidence that far from projecting a single, undifferentiated message of intimidation and reassurance to the empire at large, Assyrian public monuments and texts were carefully fine-tuned for particular audiences, at times addressing even individual cities in the same region in significantly different terms. In their nuanced differences, Esarhaddon's three steles reveal the sophistication and flexibility of Assyrian propaganda as it was used in the west in the final years of Assyria's empire.

Israel Oriental Studies 15 (1995), *Language and Culture in the Near East,* S. Izre'el and R. Drory, ed., pp. 51-72.

Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion
Re-evaluating the Propaganda of Assurnasirpal II

Since the early days of Assyriology, King Assurnasirpal II, ruler of the Assyrian empire between 883 and 859 B.C., has been notorious for the unapologetic violence of his inscriptions and bas-reliefs, which include vivid images of Assyrians slaughtering enemies and brutally punishing rebels. The text most often cited in support of this image of Assurnasirpal is an unusually long royal inscription referred to as Assurnasirpal's "Annals."[186] This text, which includes detailed accounts of the often bloody campaigns of Assurnasirpal's first 18 years of reign, was discovered in the 1850s by the British archaeologist Sir Austen Henry Layard in a temple dedicated to the Assyrian war- and storm-god Ninurta at Kalḫu (modern Nimrūd), the new imperial capital built by Assurnasirpal. Layard, who takes the text as a straightforward record of the events of the reign, condemns Assurnasirpal as a king who "celebrates the burning of innumerable women and children";[187] he goes on to dismiss Assyrian royal inscriptions in general as "nothing but a dry narrative, or rather register, of military campaigns, spoliations, and cruelties, events of little importance but to those immediately concerned. . . ."[188]

Later historians were more sophisticated in their critiques, while continuing to emphasize the violent nature of Assurnasirpal's public texts and imagery. A. T. E. Olmstead, for example, in an early history of Assyria, implies that the violence was not a matter of gratuitous cruelty, but rather a "calculated frightfulness" designed to terrify potential enemies and rebels into cooperating with Assyria.[189] Later surveys of Assyrian history reflect a

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[186] See the excellent edition of A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (114-859 BC)*, RIMA 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1991), text A.O. 101.1, pp. 191-223. As Grayson notes, the main exemplar was discovered by Layard in the Ninurta temple at Kalḫu, but other copies (whether parallel texts or exact duplicates is unclear) were identified in early excavations. These texts were also used, together with parallel passages from clearly independent texts, in creating the various early composite editions of the "Annals." Since the main exemplar (of which no complete copy survives or was ever published) was left *in situ* and is now damaged and partly missing, and since the number, provenance, and content of the alleged duplicates and parallel documents is largely unknown, Grayson's edition is based on a judicious comparison of the rather muddled early composite editions (see further Grayson, pp. 190-93).

[187] A. H. Layard, *Discoveries Among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1853), pp. 307-08.

[188] Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 539.

[189] A. T E. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1923 [repr. 1975]), p. 81. The phrase appears as the title of the chapter on Assurnasirpal's reign.

widespread conviction that violence and intimidation were hallmarks of Assurnasirpal's public texts and imagery – and probably of his actions, as well. Georges Roux, for example, describes "the sadistic refinements" of Assurnasirpal's "policy of terror" which were "duly recorded and displayed in writing and pictures," a practice Roux concludes was "no doubt necessary to inspire respect and enforce obedience."[190] H. W. F. Saggs defends Assurnasirpal's "undoubtable administrative achievements," which he argues were overlooked in the field's eagerness to castigate Assurnasirpal for his cruelty, but does not deny "the frankness and apparent relish with which he relates the brutalities he inflicted on the conquered. . . ."[191] Wm. W. Hallo remarks that, "The 'calculated frightfulness' of Assurnasirpal is documented not only in his inscriptions but even more graphically in the monumental reliefs with which he decorated his palaces. . .,"[192] and W. von Soden summarizes Assurnasirpal's reign as "marked by brutal but systematic military advances," adding that his "many inscriptions and his reliefs on the palace walls in Calah served primarily propagandistic purposes."[193]

Focusing on Assurnasirpal's relief carvings and statuary, art historians and archaeologists generally concurred. André Parrot, for example, chose Assurnasirpal's Banquet Stele as his representative example of Assyrian "monuments which were intended to impress visitors to the palace and inspire them with a salutary dread of its august occupant."[194] Henri Frankfort notes the scenes of royal piety in Assurnasirpal's Kalḫu throne room, but characterizes the bas-reliefs encircling it as depicting "the march of armies, subjugating, burning, killing, punishing, with devastating monotony, in country after country"; he concludes they "show the satisfaction of power, but also the vain attempts to establish justice and peace by means of a terror planned as retribution of resistance."[195] And M. E. L. Mallowan commented

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[190] Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq (*Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 263.

[191] H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 107.

[192] W. W. Hallo and W. Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), p. 125.

[193] Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Donald G. Schley (1985; Eng. ed., Darmstadt: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), p. 56.

[194] André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria*, trans. S. Gilbert and J. Emmons (New York: Golden Press, 1961), p. 34. Although the monument is identified there only by its discovery in Kalḫu in 1951 and its text's number of lines, its identity is clear (see illustration, p. 34). Despite Parrot's comment, the monument is relatively unthreatening; for its text, see Grayson, no. 30, pp. 288-93.

[195] Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, rev. ed. 1969), pp. 85 and 87-88.

about the same reliefs, "We are not spared the brutal side of warfare, for which the Assyrians have earned an evil reputation. In passing it may at least be said that they were not indiscriminately cruel; but an aspect of savagery was part of the propaganda by which they hoped to exact submission from those of their subjects who might be contemplating rebellion,"[196] a defense that did little to improve Assurnasirpal's reputation. While some recent commentators have demurred, the conviction that Assurnasirpal's public texts and images were designed largely to intimidate potential enemies is still very much with us.[197]

This is not surprising, particularly since the Annals text, with its descriptions of slaughter and brutal punishments, remains our most detailed and comprehensive account of the reign.[198] I have recently argued, however, that the violence of the text known as the "Annals" was not intended to intimidate, since it was not displayed to foreigners, vassal leaders, or representatives of potentially rebellious provinces, the most likely candidates for intimidation, but only to the gods and selected members of the Assyrian elite.[199] Layard found the Annals text deep within

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196 M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains I* (London: Collins, 1966), p. 98.

197 A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC* II (London: Routledge, 1995), notes occasions when Assurnasirpal "dealt ruthlessly," (p. 484) or "ravaged" (p. 483), but comments that "careful decoding" of his inscriptions reveals that far from being intimidated, "several states were anxious to establish mutually profitable relations" with him (p. 484). A recent study of the Annals (E. Badalì et al., "Studies on the Annals of Assurnasirpal II: I. Morphological Analysis," *Vicino Oriente* 5 [1982], pp. 13-73) astutely concludes that its main thrust was to present Assurnasirpal as a heroic figure establishing order for the gods in a chaotic world, adding, however, that its violent descriptions of punishments were designed to intimidate (p. 37, under "Exemplary Punishment") and were emphasized in the text with "the clear purpose of deterrence." Among art historians, see the balanced evaluations of J. E. Reade (e.g., "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires,* M. T. Larsen, ed., [Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979], pp. 329-344, esp. pp. 332 and 334), J. M. Russell (e.g., "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II," *AJA* 102 [1998], pp. 655-715, esp. p. 712), and I. J. Winter (e.g., "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 [1981], pp. 2-38). See also L. Bersani and U. Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), who argue that the scholarly focus on the violence of Assyrian reliefs reflects modern preoccupations and that the carvings consistently draw the eye beyond the graphic violence.

198 Le Gac, an early publisher of the Annals, identified two other annalistic texts of Assurnasirpal (i.e, royal inscriptions that describe events year by year), and Grayson tentatively identifies six other "annals series" (p. 192), each of which quotes passages that also occur in the Annals text, but differs overall. See further, note 205 below.

199 Barbara N. Porter, "'For the Astonishment of All Enemies': Assyrian Propaganda and Its Audiences in the Reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon," *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 35 (2000), pp. 7-18.

the Ninurta temple, inscribed on the face and again on the back of a massive paving stone in the rear of a room he and later excavators identify as the inner sanctum of the temple, where the god's statue probably stood.[200] The same text was apparently repeated on walls and floors at the temple's entrance and perhaps in the precincts of the adjacent ziggurat, or temple tower, although the archaeological record is vague and sometimes contradictory about the number of such texts and their location.[201]

The significant point is that the often violent text was displayed only in the temple and in the ziggurat area, which was part of the temple complex.[202] Recent research makes it increasingly clear that access to Assyrian temples was restricted to temple employees and priests (members of a group referred to as "temple enterers"), and on certain ritual occasions, the king, probably accompanied by members of his family and his personal guards. Such restricted access means that the Annals text, displayed in the Ninurta temple and its immediate precincts, was not accessible to foreigners, vassals, representatives of provinces, or even to most Assyrians.[203] The

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200 Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 304, plan 3, and the more detailed plan 2. For the later rediscovery of the slab, see Mallowan, *Nimrud* I, p. 87. The slab was found at the western end of the room labeled "sanctuary" on Mallowan's plan, p. 84, referred to in his comments as the "main sanctuary."

201 Layard reports the discovery of only one copy of the text, but Edwin Norris, publisher of the first edition of the text in 1861 (unfortunately composite), reports that the text on which he primarily based his edition came "from pavement slabs, engraved on both sides, found at the entrance of the Temple," rather than from an inner room; he refers to paper impressions of "other copies of the same inscription" which he says Layard made from slabs too heavy to bring to England (impressions that were later destroyed, but reported to have included notes about their texts' provenance). Norris refers to the copies from the temple entrance as the "Standard Copies" of the text, noting that he had compared these "with a series of slabs containing the same Inscription which were excavated from the Nimrud Pyramid," his term for the ziggurat (his comments appear in IR, pls. 17-26). Layard, however, reports that except for a sealed off and empty inner "vaulted chamber," the ziggurat was a solid brick block without inscriptions; he found only bricks inscribed with the king's name and genealogy in the court between the ziggurat and the palace (*Discoveries*, pp. 103-09 and 299). I am indebted to J. E. Reade (personal communication) for informing me that an unpublished letter from Rawlinson to Layard refers to slabs Rawlinson found that had fallen into Layard's abandoned trenches in the ziggurat area; Reade suggests these are Norris's ziggurat texts (see Reade's article, to appear in *Iraq* 64 [2002]). See also Grayson's introduction to the Annals, pp. 189-93, which concludes that all copies of the Annals text must have come from the Ninurta temple.

202 That ziggurats were themselves sanctuaries with restricted access, like the temples in whose precincts they lay, is suggested by a reference to two "priests of the ziggurat" (G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* [Assen: Van Gorcum and Co., 1969], p. 178).

203 See W.G. Lambert in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, J. Quaegebeur, ed. (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters and Departement Oriëntalistiek Leuven, 1993), p. 193. On the class of people known as "temple enterers" or *ērib bîti*, see *CAD* E, pp. 290 ff. On Assyrian temple personnel, see van Driel, *Cult of Aššur*, pp. 170-91, and B. Menzel, *As-*

text itself supports this assessment. Its opening passages address the god Ninurta, at whose feet it was probably displayed, making it in effect a prayer, a text designed to please and win the continuing support of Ninurta, and by extension, that of his priests, a group with many literate members who would have seen the text often as they performed their temple duties.[204] The text's detailed accounts of successful campaigns, hunts, and building projects appear to be a series of annual reports, here collected and presented to the god Ninurta. The text asserts that as a war god, Ninurta had joined other gods in commanding Assurnasirpal to conduct the military campaigns the text describes. This, together with the text's placement deep within the temple, suggests that its descriptions of slaughters and punishments were not meant for potential enemies, but were meant instead to persuade the god and his priests that Assurnasirpal had efficiently carried out his orders. If this assessment of the Annals is correct, however, the text can no longer serve as our diagnostic example of the message Assurnasirpal projected to the empire and the world at large, since its intended and actual audience was a few elite Assyrians: the god Ninurta, his clergy, the king and a few close associates.[205]

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syrische Tempel, Bd. I: Untersuchungen zu Kult, Administration und Personal (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981). Ordinary Assyrians may have had access to a similarly violent inscription displayed on a stele in the forecourt of the Ninurta Temple, but outsiders probably did not.

[204] See further B.N. Porter, "'For the Astonishment of all Enemies'" (n. 199, above) and "A Question of Violence: Ashurnasirpal II's Ninurta Temple Inscription as a Religious Polemic," in *Religious Polemics in Context,* Arie van der Kooij, ed. (Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, forthcoming).

[205] Although Grayson (*Assyrian Rulers I,* p. 192) identifies additional "annals series" (that is, texts reporting events year by year), five reportedly from Nimrūd and all quoting passages from the Ninurta Temple Annals, their existence does not indicate that the Annals' extensive accounts of slaughter and punishment were displayed in publicly accessible areas of Kalḫu. Even if some of these texts were continued on adjacent slabs (as Grayson suggests and as seems certain in two cases and possible in others; cf. J. M. Russell's cogent objections, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999], pp. 46-47), the content of such hypothetical continuations remains unknown. The similar case of Esarhaddon's Babylon building inscriptions, which contain much duplicated material but prove on close examination to be different texts with different messages, indicates that royal inscriptions containing much identical material could nevertheless be strikingly different in overall impact and purpose (B. N. Porter, *Images, Power, and Politics: Figurative Aspects of Esarhaddon's Babylonian Policy* [Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993], pp. 99-105). In the case of Assurnasirpal's "annals series," this is in fact the case with those texts that do survive in complete form; Grayson's Assurnasirpal text no. 2, for example, displayed in several places in the throne room, is quite different from the Ninurta Temple Annals, its focus being largely on non-violent activities such as royal hunts, peaceful booty collection, the creation of a sort of royal zoo, and the building of the new capital. Those "annals series" texts that quote violent

To characterize the message Assurnasirpal projected to the outside world, we must set the Annals aside and turn instead to texts and visual images displayed to a wider audience, including recently conquered provincials, Assyria's vassals and tributaries, and foreigners. In the following pages, I use two representative examples of Assurnasirpal's public imagery – the Kurkh Monolith, publicly displayed in a recently conquered region northwest of Assyria, and the texts and images of the Northwest Palace throne room at Kalḫu, publicly displayed in the Assyrian homeland to a widely assorted audience including Assyrians, provincial representatives, vassals, and foreigners – to argue that Assurnasirpal's propaganda[206] was not exclusively or even primarily aimed at intimidation, but instead alternated messages of intimidation and of friendly persuasion, in proportions carefully adjusted for different public settings and audiences.

Since Hayim Tadmor has been a major voice in the discussion of Assyrian propaganda, and since he and Miriam Tadmor have repeatedly demonstrated the value of examining texts and images in their archaeological contexts, I would like to dedicate this study to them, in gratitude for their generous help and encouragement and in celebration of the example they provide to scholars of the ancient Near East.

A look at the Kurkh Monolith quickly establishes that intimidation did indeed play a role in the public images Assurnasirpal presented to recently conquered territories. This imposing stone stele was erected in the town of Kurkh, near modern-day Diyarbekir, northwest of the Assyrian homeland.[207] On the front of the stone is an image of the king carved in bas-

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passages from the Annals proper (texts 4, 10, and 13) do so briefly and describe only parts of a single campaign. In any case, No. 10 stood in a doorway probably used only by the king and his intimate advisors (see below). No. 8, an unpublished text reported to contain brief accounts of conquering two cities, was found in a palace storeroom (FF) and may never have been publicly displayed (D. J. Wiseman and J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "The Nimrud Tablets, 1950," *Iraq* 13 [1951], p. 118). All of these "annals series," so far as they survive, are markedly less violent than the Ninurta Temple Annals text.

206 The term "propaganda" has developed a spectrum of meanings in contemporary scholarly discussion. I am using it here in its non-pejorative sense, to denote a deliberately shaped and projected public message designed to persuade, but not necessarily deliberately distorting the truth. See Porter, "'For the Astonishment of all Enemies,'" n. 6 and pp. 8-9. In the case of Assyria, as in much of the ancient world, the "public" targeted by propaganda consisted primarily of members of the elite, since others lacked political power and influence. On Assyrian propaganda, with bibliography, see H. Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting, ed., *Assyria 1995* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 325-38.

207 C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), p. 129, reports it was found in 1861 in the ruined town of Kurkh on the Tigris, about 20 miles south of Diyarbekir, by a traveler, J. E. Taylor, who arranged the transfer of the stone to the British Museum, but left no account of its original placement or situation. For photo and

relief, with emblems of Assyrian gods hovering before him. On its front and back faces is incised a text describing Assurnasirpal's campaign in the Kurkh region in his fifth year of reign. The text includes several vivid descriptions of violence, such as the slaughter of 1,000 soldiers in the mountains, dyeing "the mountain red with their blood," which was followed by cutting off captives' arms – a reminder of recent horrors that would surely have been intimidating to the region's peoples. In the text, however, their intimidating effect is partly balanced by reports of how the king spared peoples who brought him gifts during the campaign and of how soldiers who fled from the Assyrian army but later submitted were pardoned: "I settled them in their cities. I imposed upon them stringent tribute, taxes. . . ." The message, in other words, is complex: continued resistance will be severely punished and rebels will be flayed, but those who cooperate promptly will be spared violence, and those who submit later will be punished but allowed to live peacefully under Assyrian rule. The point of the text is not so much to terrify its readers and listeners[208] into submission, as to remind them that while Assyrian power was irresistible, those who submitted would fare reasonably well. Intimidation is a significant element here, but it is not the sole effect of the text.

If the stele's text is only moderately intimidating, its visual imagery seems designed to convey no threat at all. Certainly the stele, almost 7 feet tall, is imposing, and its carved image of the king, wearing the formal robe of an Assyrian ruler and carrying a scepter in his left hand, would have loomed over viewers with an unmistakable air of authority. Nevertheless, he is presented not as an armed warrior but as a pious prince, raising his hand toward five gods in the traditional gesture expressing a power-charged

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discussion, see J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1982), I, p. 182, with photo in II, fig. 135. For the text, see Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers I*, Assurnasirpal text no. 19, pp. 256-62. For the debated ancient identity of Kurkh (as Tushan or Tidu), see M. Liverani, *Studies on the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II, 2: Topographical Analysis* (Rome: Università di Roma 'La Sapienza', 1992), p. 39, with a map of the fifth campaign in fig. 6 and a discussion of that campaign's course and results on p. 93.

208 I have argued elsewhere that publicly displayed texts such as the Kurkh Monolith were probably read aloud for the benefit of their largely illiterate audiences (and in places like Kurkh, quite likely translated into Aramaic) during public dedication ceremonies probably attended by both local dignitaries and Assyrian representatives. Later, some idea of the text's message and content probably survived as local knowledge, while members of the elite who employed Assyrian-speaking scribes to help with business dealings could have had the text read and translated. For further discussion, see B.N. Porter, "Language, Audience, and Impact in Imperial Assyria," *Language and Culture in the Near East: Diglossia, Bilingualism, Registers*, S. Izre'el and R. Drory, ed., Israel Oriental Studies 15 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 51-72.

communication between god and man.[209] While the royal image was a reminder of Assyria's powerful presence, it avoided any suggestion of menace.

Although the stele's text does not comment on why it was erected, other inscriptions offer some clue to the Assyrians' intentions. The Annals text, for example, reports that after the conquest of the city Matiatu, Assurnasirpal "made an image of myself (and) wrote thereon (an account of) my powerful victories. I erected (it) in Matiatu."[210] After conquering another ruler, it reports, he made "a colossal royal image of myself, wrote thereon (a description of) my victories and praises, (and) erected (it) within his palace. I made my monumental inscriptions, wrote thereon (an account of) my praises (and) my might, (and) deposited (them) at his gate."[211] These passages suggest that the purpose of these monuments erected in recently conquered areas was to serve as a visible record of Assurnasirpal's military success. That the purpose was partly intimidation seems clear, but the desired cooperation was evidently to be achieved not so much by "frightfulness" as by a relatively matter-of-fact record of Assurnasirpal's conquest: a reminder of "my might," but one in which vivid accounts of Assyrian violence would be somewhat tempered by accounts of occasional royal pardons and by references to the benefits of Assyrian rule.

It might, however, be argued that monuments like the Kurkh Monolith and the monument erected in Matiatu were special cases, targeting recently conquered peoples in a single region, a situation in which intimidation might have seemed a particularly promising strategy. To determine if the blend of intimidation and persuasion they presented is typical of Assurnasirpal's public messages, we need to compare them with texts and images presented to a more general audience.

The ideal example is surely the assemblage of texts and images displayed in the throne room of the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, a setting to which people came from across the empire and beyond in order to report to the king, to appeal to him for justice, to deliver annual tribute and "inquire the health of the king," or to negotiate treaties and alliances. In a recent

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209 U. Magen links the gesture of outstretched finger directed toward gods with the Akkadian phrase *ubāna tarāṣu* 'to stretch out the finger,' a gesture that she argues was understood to link gods and men in powerful ways, some positive and some negative, as in directing the effect of magical rituals: U. Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen – Aspekte der Herrschaft: Eine Typologie,* Baghdader Forschungen 9 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1986), pp. 98-99.

210 Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers I,* text 1, col. ii, line 91.

211 Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers I,* text 1, col. i, lines 97-99, with the word translated as "statue" changed here to "image," reflecting the broad spectrum of meanings of the Akkadian word *ṣalmu.*

study of the palace of King Sennacherib, John M. Russell examines Assyrian documentary evidence regarding those who had access to Assyrian throne rooms. The resulting list includes (in addition to gods and future kings): foreign laborers who helped build the palace; tribute and gift bearers from vassal states and provinces; foreign ambassadors and members of diplomatic missions; guards, professional staff, courtiers, various foreigners, senior officers, ministers, and advisors (all listed as recipients of palace wine rations); visitors entertained at royal banquets; members of the royal family; royal scribes; household staff and servants; and of course, the king himself.[212] In addition, Assurnasirpal reports that for the dedication of his new palace he invited 47,074 men and women from across Assyria, 5,000 foreign dignitaries, 16,000 people from the city itself, and 1,500 officials from other palaces for ten days of celebration. During these dedication festivities, the bas-reliefs, statues, and prominently displayed texts of the throne room were surely shown to visitors, read aloud, and if necessary translated.[213] The audience for the texts and images of Assurnasirpal's Kalḫu throne room was consequently a large one, drawn from across the empire and beyond.

In February of 1846, only four months after the beginning of his excavations at Nimrūd, Layard began to explore the massive room that would in time prove to have been the principal throne room of Assurnasirpal's palace (Room B in Fig. 1 above, p 2).[214] Mallowan, continuing its excavation a century later, describes the room as "the largest and most elaborate in the building," 47 x 10 m., "obviously planned to hold a large concourse of persons in the presence of the king whose throne-base [discovered at the eastern end of the room] consisted of a huge gypsum slab measuring 3 x 2.4 meters which weighed over 15 tons."[215] The room and its approaches from the outer courtyard were lined with stone slabs whose bas-reliefs depicted royal hunts, warfare and booty collection, winged divinities, strange palm-like trees, and foreigners presenting tribute to the king. Following Layard's excavations, many of these were removed to museums and private collec-

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[212] J.M. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), pp. 223-40.

[213] The text is that on the Banquet Stele, so named because it describes the menu for the feast; Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers I*, text 30, pp. 288-93. See also Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace*, pp. 224-25.

[214] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* I (London: John Murray, 1849), pp. 62-63.

[215] *Nimrud* I, p. 96. Continued excavation of the palace and further research have produced more extensive plans of the palace, along with reconstructions of the placement of its now dispersed carvings. The most complete reconstruction, with discussion, bibliography, drawings and plans, is published in the volumes of Meuszyński, *Rekonstrucktion* I, and Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II and III.

tions around the world; their original placement, however, has now been painstakingly reconstructed.[216] In 1983, I. J. Winter used this reconstruction to analyze the throne room's decorative program, arguing that the reliefs illustrated the king's qualities and achievements, which were also summarized in the slightly varying text known as the "Standard Inscription" incised on each slab.[217] She argues that despite the violence of some scenes, the images and text combined to present "the throneroom . . . as the symbolic center of the empire and its resident lord as the sole legitimate force in its maintenance. . . ,"[218] a message more of royal validation than of intimidation. J. M. Russell has since identified and established the position of more texts displayed in the throne room complex, making it possible for the first time to assess the combined impact on visitors of all the room's texts and images.[219]

To understand the room's impact, let us follow a delegation of tributaries after they entered the palace through its heavily guarded gate,[220] crossed the large and busy courtyard, and were ushered into a recessed area (Area D on the palace plan, Fig. 4) facing arched doorway "d" to await their turn to enter the throne room.[221]

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[216] For these reconstructions, see above, n. 215. On the probable function of different sections of the palace, see Russell, "Program of the Palace," *AJA* 102 (1998), pp. 655-715. On the probable nature and placement of now missing courtyard reliefs, see Reade, *Orientalia* (n.s.) 63 (1994), p. 275.

[217] I. J. Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, P. O. Harper and H. Pittman, ed. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), pp. 15-31; see also Winter, *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981), n. 12.

[218] Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom," p. 28.

[219] Russell, *The Writing on the Wall*, ch. 2 and catalog 2.

[220] Only the wall up to the gate on the east side of the courtyard now survives, but the gate's location is essentially certain.

[221] Winter's analyses of the impact and message of the throne room assume that visitors entered through the huge doorway ("e" in the plan, Fig. 4) in the center of the throne room; Mallowan (*Nimrud* I, p. 103) and Paley and Sobolewkski (*Reconstruction* III, pp. 12-13), however, argue plausibly that visitors entered through doorway "d" from the recessed area in the throne room facade, so that they would have proceeded down the entire length of the throne room, absorbing the impact of all its carvings and to a lesser extent, its texts. Paley argues that the central doorway was probably reserved for "more important state occasions" (p. 13) and was perhaps intended to frame the king when the doors were flung open to let him observe ceremonies in the courtyard or when he moved in procession to the temple and ziggurat on the far side of the courtyard (see also Russell, "Program of the Palace," *AJA* 102 (1998), p. 710).

Facing the visitors was a large bas-relief[222] (Fig. 5) showing a procession of tributaries, half-crouching in deference, who carry gifts and approach the king (on the left in the tall royal hat), who is shown holding his bow, quietly reminding visitors of his role as military leader and conqueror, but raising one hand in greeting. Despite the tributaries' submissive posture, it was an encouraging tableau, showing subjects honorably received by a benevolent king. At the entrance to the recess, on the far left, behind the carved figure of the king, stood an imposing statue of a winged bull-divinity, 17 feet tall, who regarded the visitors with a not unfriendly gaze. Facing him, a winged *apkallu*, a traditional guardian

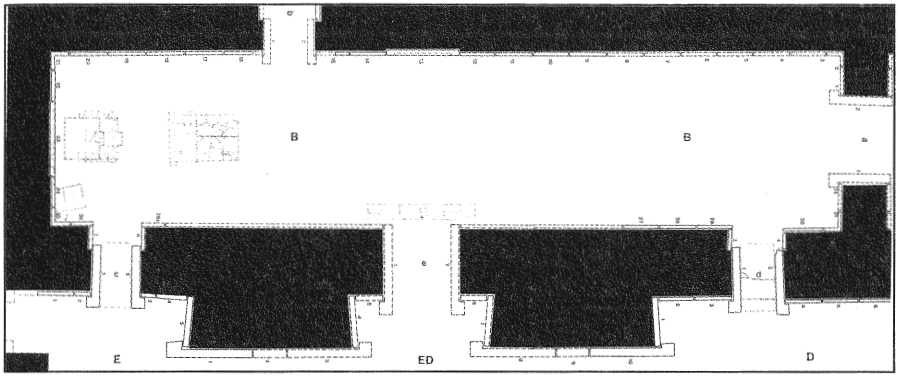

Figure 4 Plan of the Throne Room, with Entrances from the Outer Courtyard

divinity, reached out with a bumpy oval object, referred to in magical texts as a "purifier."[223] Flanking the arched entrance leading to the throne room were statues of winged lion-men with crowns, cradling a gazelle-like animal in one arm. Although all of these winged figures were divine guards

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[222] For detailed drawings of all the bas-reliefs and statues in position, see the volumes of Meuszyński and of Paley and Sobolewski (above, n. 215); for photos of the threshold texts and statues, see Russell, *Writing*, pp. 308 ff., and Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* III, figs. 1-11.

[223] For a convincing discussion of these two latter figures as magical palace guardians, and of *apkallus* as conferring blessing as well, see Russell, "Program of the Palace," *AJA* 102 (1998), pp. 674-75 and 678. On *apkallus*, ancient sages who by Assyrian times had become minor divinities, see Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, "The Mesopotamian Counterparts of the Biblical Nĕpīlîm," in *Perspectives on Language and Text* (Festschrift Francis I. Andersen), E. W. Conrad and E. G. Newing, ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 39-43, and F. A. M. Wiggerman, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts* (Groningen: Styx and PP, 1992), pp. 48, 73-77, and 92-101. As they are represented in the palace, their heavy musculature and soldier's kilts emphasize their role as guards; their association with the water god Ea gave them also a role as magical purifiers, presumably using the oval (whose further associations are discussed below) to sprinkle water from their buckets, protecting the palace and those who entered it against evil forces.

for the throne room, they project no menace, but rather an aura of serene, benevolent power.

The visitors were also surrounded by inscriptions, most prominently copies of the so-called Standard Inscription placed beside the door at easily readable height. Important foreign visitors may have been accompanied by their own scribes, who could have read and translated the texts for them.

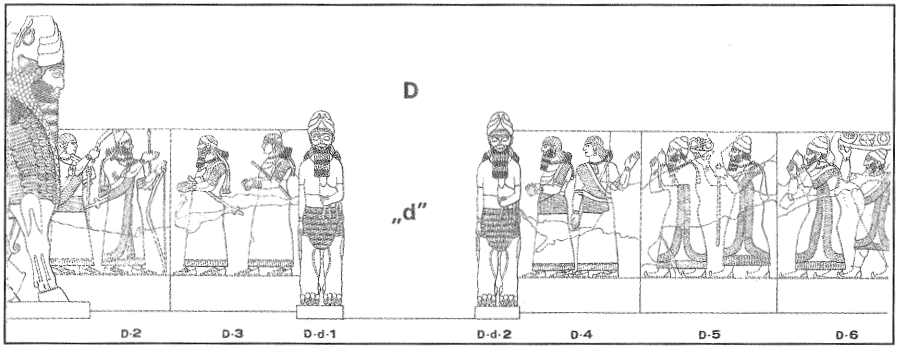

Figure 5 Procession of Tributaries Approaching the King, Area D

Russell suggests that prominent visitors may have been shown the public rooms of the palace by guides, perhaps the interpreters mentioned in palace wine ration lists, who would have recited or summarized prominent texts.[224] In addition, visitors were certainly escorted after they had passed the palace gates by an Assyrian patrol whose officer may well have explained the texts and pictures in the staging area and throne room, to prepare the visitors, ensuring that their royal audience had its full intended impact. In these ways, the complex assemblage of texts and images in the throne room and its approaches would have been made intelligible to those who could not read the texts and to foreign visitors who spoke other languages or were accustomed to different visual imagery.[225]

Significantly, the texts displayed in this staging area are unintimidating. The Standard Inscription is a bland summary, identifying Assurnasirpal as the palace's owner, praising him, listing his conquests with no descriptions of violence, and concluding with the building of the palace.[226] Brief enough to be read in its entirety, it would have provided a reassuring introduction.

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[224] Russell notes that "it seems natural that at least part of [the interpreters'] function would have been to serve as tour guides for visiting foreigners. . . ." (*Sennacherib's Palace*, p. 233). He argues that such guides, who were probably illiterate, could have memorized short captions, but not longer texts – an unnecessary reservation in the light of reports of the memorization of very long texts in other non-literate and semi-literate societies.

[225] Russell emphasizes that the presence of extensive writings was itself an impressive demonstration of wealth and power (*Sennacherib's Palace*, pp. 8-10).

[226] Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers I*, text no. 23, pp. 268-76.

A second text, inscribed on the winged bull at the entrance, described the king's collection of exotic animals during his travels and his creation of a zoo for all people in Kalḫu; now partly destroyed, the text may have continued by describing his peaceful collection of booty from Carchemish.[227] As the visitor entered the throne room, he passed a third text, inscribed on the statues in the entrance, which again identified the palace as Assurnasirpal's, listed his conquests, and described his zoo-making efforts.[228] These texts, images, and statues ushered the visitor into the throne room primed with visual and verbal images of a powerful, divinely protected, and largely benevolent king.

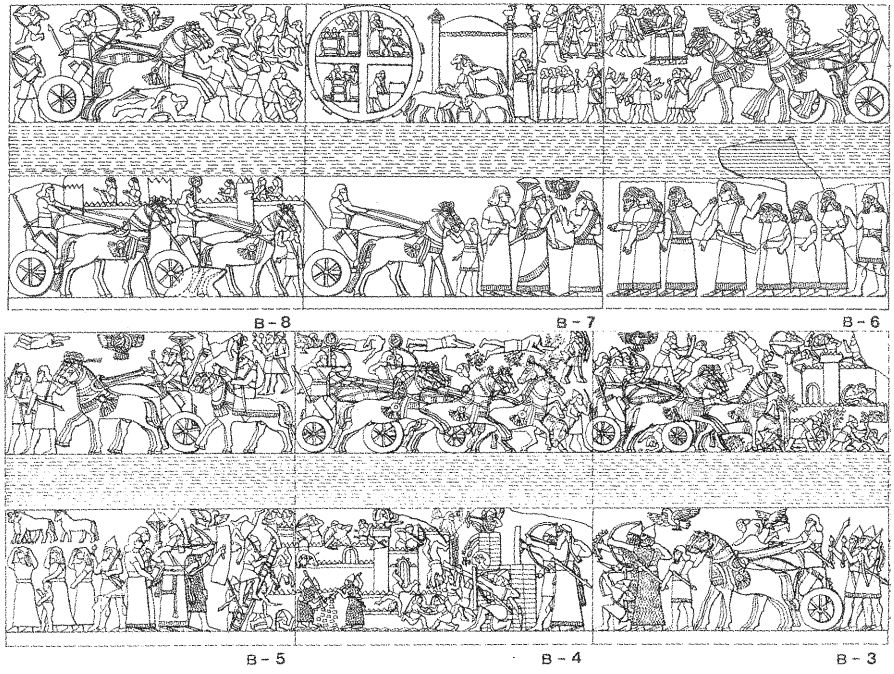

Figure 6 Scenes of Warfare and Triumph facing Doorway "d"

[227] Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* III, p. 17 and photo, fig. 7; this duplicates sections of Grayson's text 2, pp. 223 ff., referred to by Russell as the Throne-Base/Colossus Text. The section of our text in the now destroyed underbelly section may have continued to follow the Throne Base inscription, describing booty collection at Carchemish.

[228] (B) D-d-1 and (B) D-d-2, Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* III, pp. 15-16, and Russell, *Writing*, p. 248.

Inside, the message changed. The throne room was imposing – over 150 feet long with walls some 30 feet in height[229]– and was dimly lit by clerestory windows, by light from the doorways, and probably by torches held by servants.[230] Its high walls were lined with reliefs in two tiers separated by copies of the 'Standard Inscription,' the lower scenes about 6.5 feet high, the inscription about 2 feet high, and the upper band of images about 2.5 feet high, an assemblage that rose some 12 feet above the floor.[231] If courtiers stood in groups along the walls, it was the upper carvings, beginning about 9 feet above the floor, which were most easily visible.

The scenes confronting visitors as they entered would have chilled any potential enemy of Assyria. Opposite the doorway were carvings in bas-relief (Fig. 6) showing Assyrian soldiers attacking two cities, led by the massive figure of the king, shooting his bow; prisoners being led away; and massed chariots thundering by, with bodies of beheaded enemies prominently displayed above them. As the visitor turned to move down the room toward the king, seated on a raised dais some 35 m. away, he continued to pass scenes showing defeated enemies and thundering chariots,[232] accompanied by the Standard Inscription's summary of the king's conquests and achievements. The cumulative effect was surely daunting.

At the midpoint, however, the message changed again. Here (Fig. 2, p.7) tall figures of the king as shepherd, each filling the entire 12-foot height of a slab, advanced from each side toward a central scene in which two guardian winged *apkallus* extended their oval objects toward two figures of the king pointing upward to a god hovering in a winged disk over a tree-like object with palmette top and trunk surrounded by an arch of palmettes. The meaning of this enigmatic scene is much debated; I have argued that its principal elements – the bumpy oval shape of the *apkallus*' "purifier," their characteristic gesture, the bucket in the *apkallus*' hands, and the elements of the tree-like object itself – can best be explained if we recognize the central part of the tree-like object as a stylized date palm tree, as

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229 Paley and Sobolewski *Reconstruction* III, p. 27, citing Layard (who reports the walls were still standing to a height of 12 or 14 feet) and Mallowan (who estimates they were originally 11 or 12 meters high).

230 According to both Layard and Mallowan, quoted in Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* III, pp. 5 and 10. The idea of the torches is my own, reflecting my conviction that the throne room's elaborate decoration, and the king himself, must have been intended to be seen.

231 Mallowan, *Nimrud* I, p. 98. The slab rested on a stone plinth.

232 The few surviving bas-reliefs on the north wall show a city falling, chariots, and perhaps a procession of tributaries; see Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Tafel 3, nos. B-27 and B-28, and J. E. Reade, *Iraq* 47 (1985), p. 208.

suggested by its form in all the large palace wall carvings.[233] The date palm, referred to as the "tree of abundance" in Mesopotamian legal texts, is remarkably fruitful, but an abundant date crop (as was known in Mesopotamia) can only be obtained from the tree by artificial pollination, in which male flower clusters – bumpy and oval in shape – are shaken over female flowers, over which water (from a bucket such as that carried by the *apkallus*) is sprinkled to hold the pollen in place. The scene suggests a metaphoric pollination by divinities, conferring fruitfulness and abundance. Edith Porada has argued that the arch of palmettes linked to the trunk by wavy lines represents an orchard of date palms linked by irrigation canals, and that the object as a whole was understood to represent the empire as fruitful orchard.[234] The gift of abundance here reaches the empire through the king, standing between the *apkallus* and the tree-like object.[235] The scene represents the king as an awesomely benevolent figure, little lower than the gods, who joins them in conferring order, abundance, and security on the world.[236]

As the visitor advanced past further images of conquest and approached the enthroned king at the far end of the room, the tree scene was repeated (Pl. 33), this time framing the king himself, so that its benevolent image became the climax of the room's decorative program. Here, the scene was flanked by winged gods, emphasizing – and from an Assyrian point of view, perhaps actually conferring – the gods' protection and support for the king. Beyond them, at the room's corners, carvings of the tree and palmettes evoked the fruitfulness of Assurnasirpal's empire. At his left, scenes

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233 For documentation and further discussion, see B. N. Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52 (1993), pp. 129-39 (reprinted here).

234 Edith Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections: The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library*, I, Bollingen Series 14 (Washington, D.C.: Pantheon Books, 1948), pp. 76 and 93.

235 Elsewhere in the palace, *apkallus* appear to confer this divine gift directly on the "tree," without the assistance of the king. *Apkallus* without trees and with varying equipment also flank doorways; whether they are purifying or blessing those who pass before them, acting as divine guards, or all of the above, is unclear.

236 For other interpretations of the tree scene, see S. Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 (1993), pp. 161-208, and Russell, "Program of the Palace," pp. 687-711. I would argue that the apotropaic nature of the tree-like object is questionable and that the apotropaic nature of the *apkallus*, which is well established, does not preclude their participation in a divine symbolic pollination – without which, the oval, bumpy shape of the "purifier," the awkward gesture of the *apkallus*, and the presence of a bucket are difficult to explain.

showed him as a hunter of bulls and lions, symbolically imposing order on a violent world.[237]

After making his obeisance to the great lord, our visitor would have withdrawn from the room, either directly through the doorway beside the throne[238], or more probably, retiring respectfully to exit through the distant door (doorway "d" in Fig. 4) by which he had entered. As the visitor left the throne room, he passed between carved winged figures cradling deer and raising a branch with palmette flowers in salute, as if granting the departing visitor himself fruitfulness and abundance. On the doorway's paving, the visitor crossed one final inscription; its signs, arranged for reading by people leaving the room, were inlaid with eye-catching copper. Little of the inscription now survives, but its traces suggest it quoted the familiar text summarizing Assurnasirpal's conquests and describing his collection of animals for a national zoo.

The benevolent image of the zoo-making king was a fitting conclusion for the visitor's experience, in which he had moved from the awesome, but basically welcoming, staging area into the throne room, to be confronted first by intimidating scenes of death and defeat, then by larger images of a benevolent king and gods hovering over the abundant empire, finally reaching the enthroned king himself, an awesome figure whose benevolence was emphasized by the tree scene repeated behind him. Now reaching the safety and sunlight of the courtyard, the visitor completed a journey that had confronted him with a nicely calculated alternation of intimidation and friendly persuasion.

Our two examples generate a new understanding of Assurnasirpal's propaganda. Once we have set aside the Ninurta Temple Annals, displayed only to gods and Assyrian insiders, the message Assurnasirpal presented to the outside world assumes a quite different appearance. Both the Kurkh Monolith and the Kalḫu throne room project a complex message – not just "calculated frightfulness," but a careful balance of carrot and stick. At Kurkh, addressing recently conquered and potentially rebellious peoples, Assurnasirpal's text is certainly intimidating, but its reminders of recent Assyrian violence are somewhat balanced by reports of occasional clemency, and its visual image is peaceful, perhaps designed with the hope that

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[237] It is highly unlikely that our visitor, at this charged moment as he faced the enthroned king, would have taken time to read the inscription on the throne base. This account (whose initial sections were familiar to the visitor from their use on the door statues in the staging area) was probably intended largely for the pleasure of the king and his court.

[238] This doorway would have provided convenient access to the courtyard for the king, his advisors, servants, and guards on non-ceremonial occasions, and because of its close proximity to the throne and the king's person, was probably reserved for them.

in time the region would prove loyal and the stele would become an accepted monument to Assyria's rightful rule, its intimidating descriptions largely forgotten and its promised rewards long since accepted. The throne room, whose message would have reached a more varied audience of outsiders, presented a different balance of carrot and stick, with its sometimes intimidating visual images outweighed by the larger and more prominent carvings depicting gods and king together creating abundance, and by the generally benevolent tone of its texts, which minimize references to the violence of conquest and consistently conclude by describing the king as a benevolent builder of cities or creator of zoos. "Calculated frightfulness" plays a role in both settings, but it is only part of a complex propaganda combining intimidation and friendly persuasion in proportions carefully calculated for different audiences.

Sources of the Illustrations

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Figure 2, p. 7: Central tree scene, Northwest Palace throne room. After R. Sobolewski's drawing in Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Tafel 2, Panels B-12, B-13 and B-14. Reproduced by the kind permission of S. Paley and R. Sobolewski, and the family of J. Meuszyński.

Figure 3, p. 60: The Northwest corner of the Assyrian empire, ca. 670 B.C. ©Michael H. Porter, The Casco Bay Assyriological Institute. Reproduced by the kind permission of M. H. Porter.

Figure 4, p. 91: Plan of the Northwest Palace throne room and its entrances from the outer court. After Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* II, Plan 2. Reproduced by the kind permission of S. Paley and R. Sobolewski.

Figure 5, p. 92: Tributaries approaching the king, Area D. After R. Sobolewski's drawing in Paley and Sobolewski, *Reconstruction* III, Plate 4. Reproduced by the kind permission of S. Paley and R. Sobolewski.

Figure 6, p. 93: Scenes of warfare and triumph facing doorway "d". After R. Sobolewski's drawing in Meuszyński, *Rekonstruktion* I, Tafel 2, Panels B-3 through B-8. Reproduced by the kind permission of R. Sobolewski and the family of J. Meuszyński.

II. Plates

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Plate 2: Assurnasirpal II with attendants (Bowdoin Museum, 1860.5). Photo by Dennis Griggs, courtesy of The Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

Plate 3: Winged deity with tree image (Bowdoin Museum, 1860.4). Photo by Dennis Griggs, courtesy of The Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

Plate 4: Winged deity with bucket and oval object (Bowdoin Museum, 1860.2). Photo by Dennis Griggs, courtesy of The Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

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Plate 6: Head of Assurnasirpal II (Bowdoin Museum, 1906.4). Photo by Dennis Griggs, courtesy of The Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

Plate 7: Flower clusters from male date palms. From *Date Production and Protection with Special Reference to North Africa and the Near East*, F. A. O. Plant Production and Protection Paper 35 (Rome: FAO, 1982), p. 61, reproduced courtesy of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

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Plate 15: King Esarhaddon and captives, on the stele erected just inside a gateway of Til Barsip (Syrian National Museum in Aleppo, M7497). Photo by Anwar Abdel Ghafour, reproduced by the kind permission of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, and of the Syrian National Museum, Aleppo.

Plate 16: The gateway stele from Til Barsip (M7497) (drawing from J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, II [Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1982], fig. 218), reproduced by the kind permission of Dr. Börker-Klähn.

Plate 17: The stele near the citadel at Til Barsip (Aleppo Museum, M7502). Photo by Anwar Abdel Ghafour, reproduced by the kind permission of

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Plate 27: Kneeling Egyptian prince in tunic, on the stele near the citadel, Til Barsip (M7497, detail of front of stele). Photo by Anwar Abdel Ghafour, reproduced by the kind permission of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, and of the Syrian National Museum, Aleppo.

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Summary

The essays collected in this volume (two previously unpublished) examine ways in which the kings of ancient Assyria used visual images to shape political attitudes and behavior at the royal court, in the Assyrian homeland, and in Assyria's vast and culturally diverse empire. The essays discuss visual images commissioned by Assyrian kings between the ninth and seventh century B.C., all carved in stone and publicly displayed – some on steles erected in provincial cities or in temples, some on the massive stone slabs lining the walls of Assyrian palaces and temples, and one on top of a stone bearing an inscription granting privileges to a recently conquered state. Although the essays examine a wide assortment of images, they develop a single hypothesis: that Neo-Assyrian kings saw visual images as powerful and effective tools of public persuasion, and that Assyrian carvings were often commissioned for much the same reason that modern politicians arrange «photo opportunities» – to shape political opinion and behavior in diverse and not always cooperative populations by means of publicly displayed, politically charged visual images.

Although there is increasing agreement among Assyriologists and art historians that Assyrian royal stone carvings were created and displayed at least in part for their political impact on contemporaries, there is still considerable debate about the effectiveness of visual imagery as a political tool, about the message each particular image was designed to convey, and about the audiences these images were meant to influence. These are the problems the essays collected here confront.

Four of the essays focus on a group of enigmatic, widely varied images often lumped under the misleading rubric, «the Assyrian sacred tree.» The essays collected here consider the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II as the setting for one important group of these images; the implications of the scene in which winged figures flank the «tree» image and touch it with bumpy oval objects; the proposal advanced by Simo Parpola that some Assyrians understood the image to represent the Assyrian king as «perfect man»; and the function of the scene showing the «tree» with winged figures as an Assyrian response to a haunting sense of time as destroyer. Other essays in the volume explore the political implications of the images carved on the object known as «The Black Stone of Esarhaddon»; the potential for visual images to undermine the political agenda they were intended to support; the adaptation of similar images to carry different political messages; and the role of visual imagery in an Assyrian propaganda that presented messages of both intimidation and friendly persuasion.

Plate 1: Winged, bird-headed deities flanking a stylized tree; Room H, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (Bowdoin 1860.1)

Plate 2: Assurnasirpal II with attendants, holding a bow and drinking bowl; West Wing, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (Bowdoin 1860.5)

Plate 3: Winged deity carrying a bucket and oval object, facing a stylized tree; Room T, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (Bowdoin 1860.4)

Plate 4: Winged deity carrying a bucket and oval object; Room S, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (Bowdoin 1860.2)

Plate 5: Assurnasirpal II with hand raised in salute, followed by a winged deity; Nimrūd, possibly from the Ninurta Temple (Bowdoin 1860.3)

Plate 6: The head of Assurnasirpal II from panel B-14; Throne Room B, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (Bowdoin 1906.4)

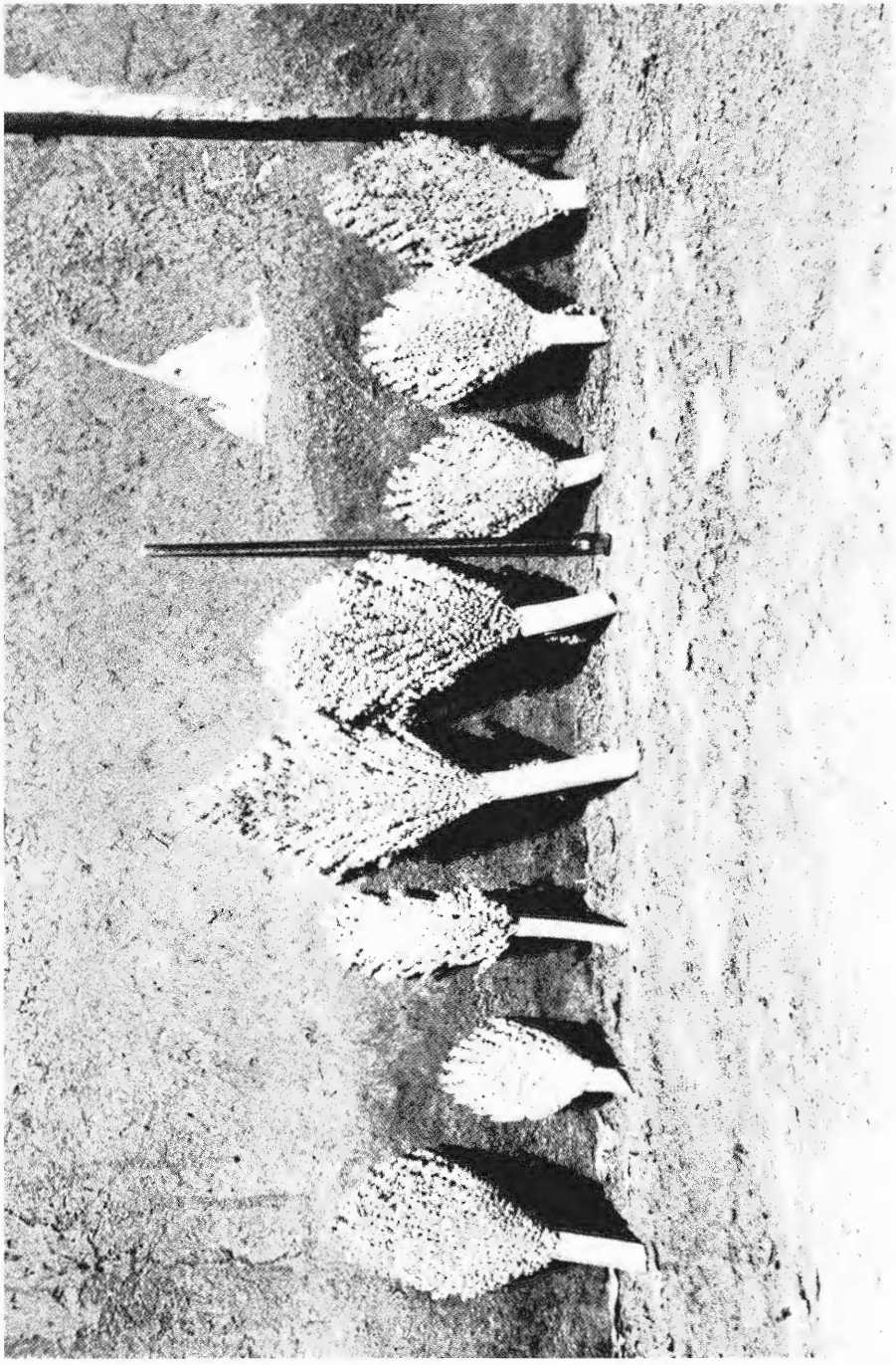

Plate 7: Flower clusters of male date palms drying in the sun, Shahdad, Kerman, Iraq (FAO)

Plate 8: Winged figure with oval object; Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (detail of Bowdoin 1860.2)

Plate 9: Winged figure with tree; Room L, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art)

Plate 10: Signs carved on the top of the Black Stone (British Museum, WA 91027)

Plate 11: Assurbanipal as a basket-bearing king; Esagila Temple, Babylon (British Museum, BM 90864)

Plate 12: Figurine representing the Sumerian king Ur-Nammu as basket bearer (Morgan Library, MLC 2628)

Plate 13: Assurbanipal as a basket-bearing king; Ezida Temple, Borsippa (British Museum, BM 90865)

Plate 14: Shamashshumukin as a basket-bearing king; Ezida Temple, Borsippa (British Museum, BM 90866)

Plate 15: King Esarhaddon and captives, Til Barsip gateway stele (Syrian National Museum in Aleppo, M7497)

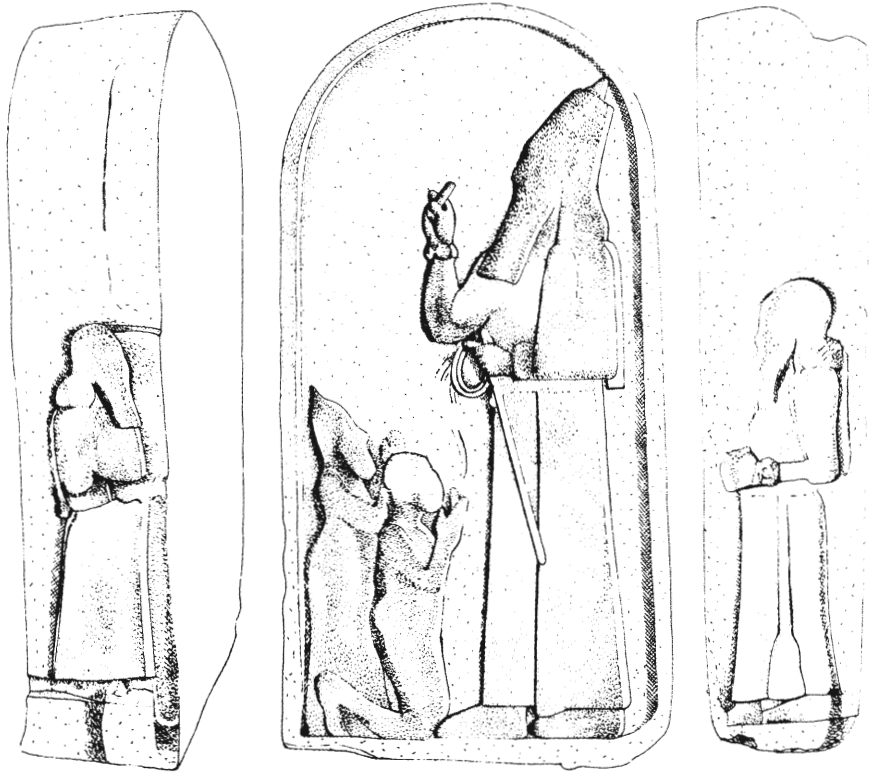

Plate 16: The gateway stele from Til Barsip (M7497) (from J. Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und Vergleichbare Felsreliefs,* II [Mainz am Rhein: Phillip von Zabern, 1982] fig. 218)

Plate 17: The stele near the citadel at Til Barsip (Aleppo Museum, M7502).

Plate 18: The stele near the citadel at Til Barsip (Börker-Klähn, *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen*, II, fig. 217)

Plate 19: The bearded Assyrian heir, on the gateway stele at Til Barsip (detail of M7497, left panel)

Plate 20: The Assyrian heir, on the left side of the gateway stele, Til Barsip (M7497, left panel)

Plate 21: The Assyrian heir, on the left side of the stele near the citadel, Til Barsip (M7502, left panel)

Plate 22: The Assyrian heir with pendant, on the stele near the citadel, Til Barsip, (M7502, detail of left panel)

Plate 23: The Babylonian heir with pendant, on the stele near the citadel, Til Barsip (M7502, detail of right panel)

Plate 24: The Babylonian heir's sash with tassel, on the stele near the citadel at Til Barsip (M7502, detail of right panel)

Plate 25: The captives, on the gateway stele, Til Barsip (M7497, detail)

Plate 26: The captives, on the stele near the citadel, Til Barsip (M7497, detail)

Plate 27: Kneeling Egyptian prince in tunic, on the stele near the citadel, Til Barsip (M7497, detail)

Plate 28: The Sam'al stele (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, VA 2708)

Plate 29: The Sam'al stele (Börker-Klähn, Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen, II, fig. 219)

Plate 30: The Phoenician king Abdi-Milkutti, on the face of the Sam'al stele (detail, VA 2708)

Plate 31: The Babylonian heir with his unusual pendant, on the left panel of the Sam'al stele (detail, VA 2708)

Plate 32: The Assyrian heir, on the right panel of the Sam'al stele (detail, VA 2708)

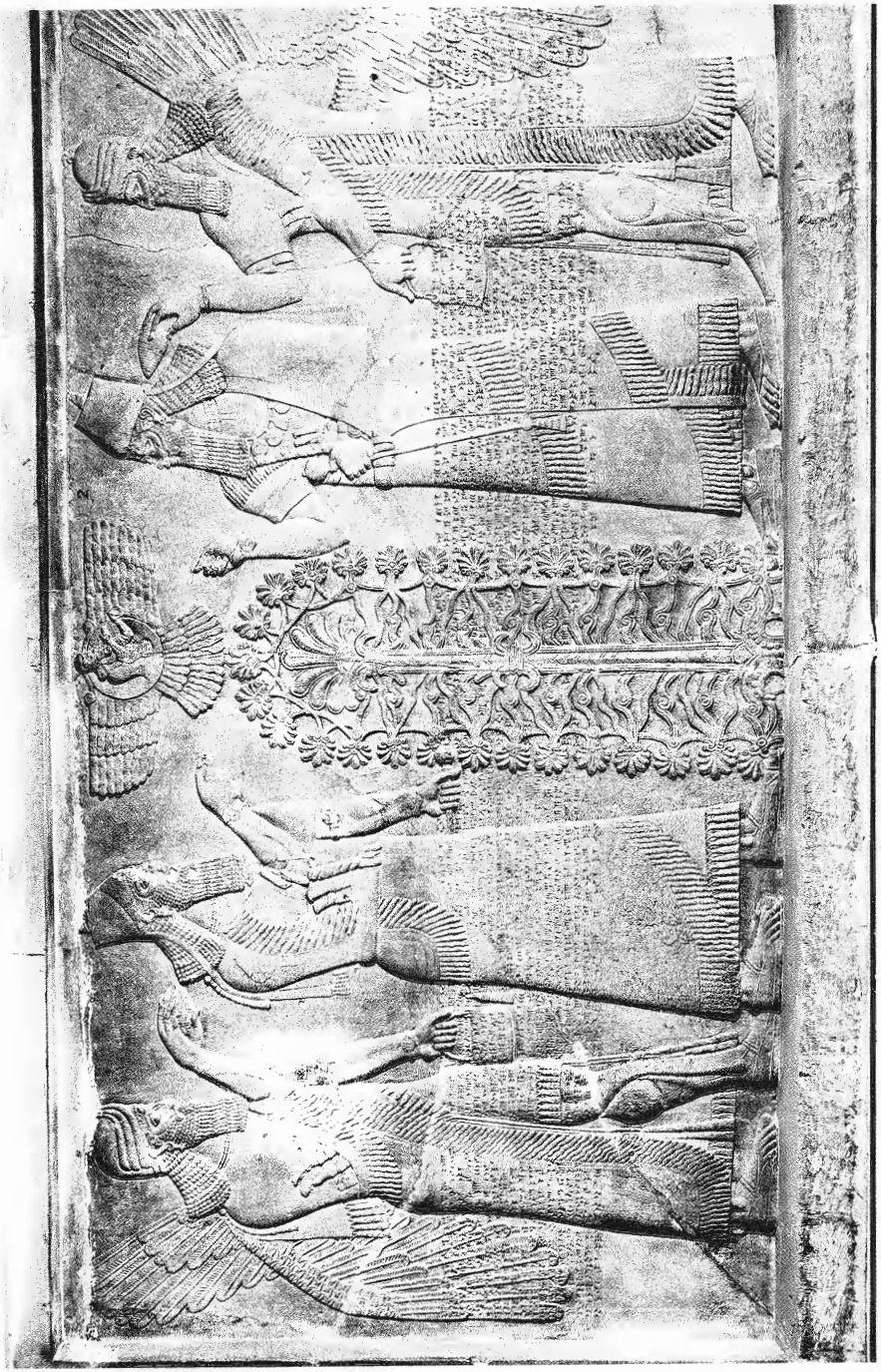

Plate 33: The tree scene behind the throne; Panel B-23 in the throne room, Northwest Palace, Nimrūd (The British Museum, WA 124531)